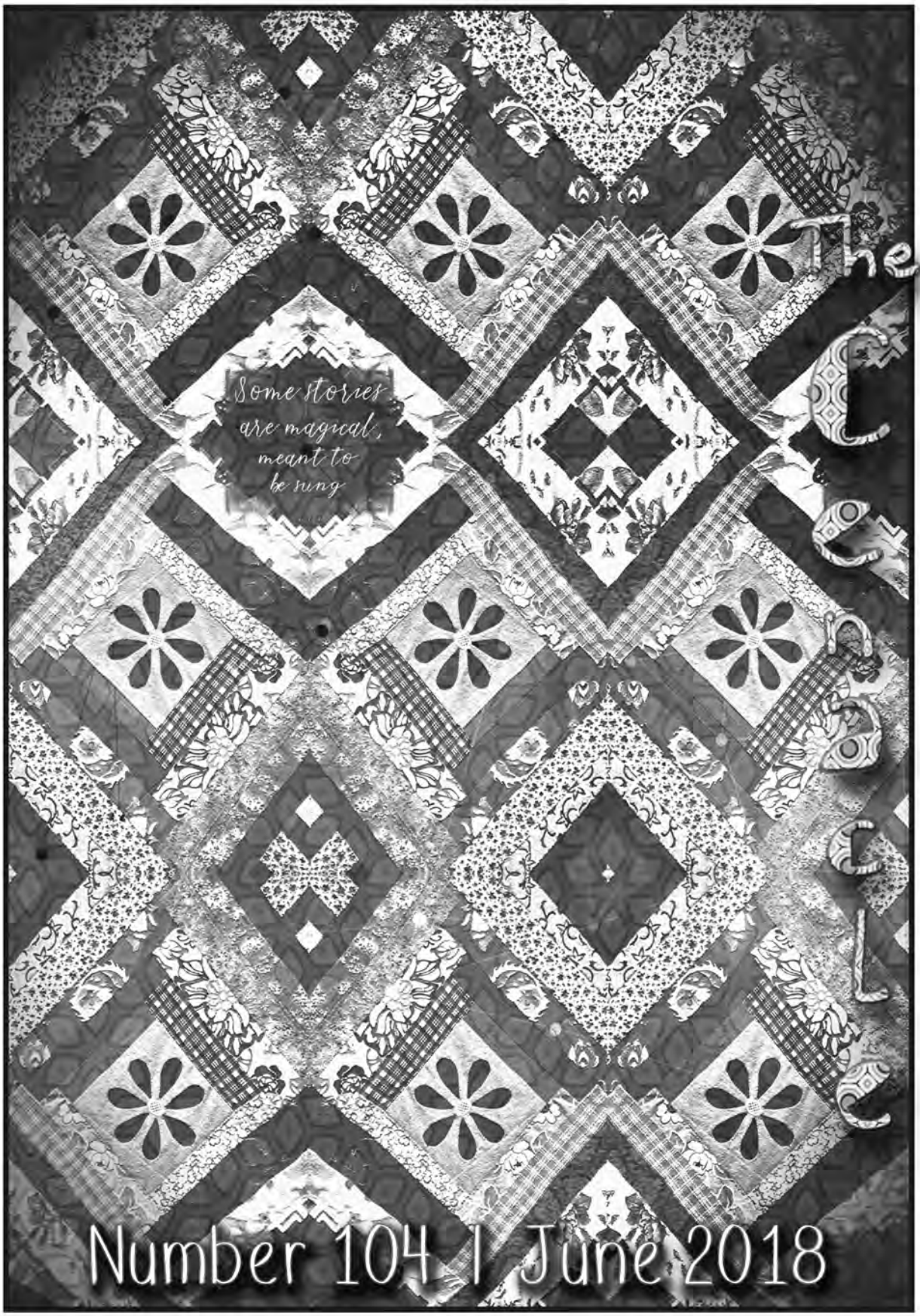
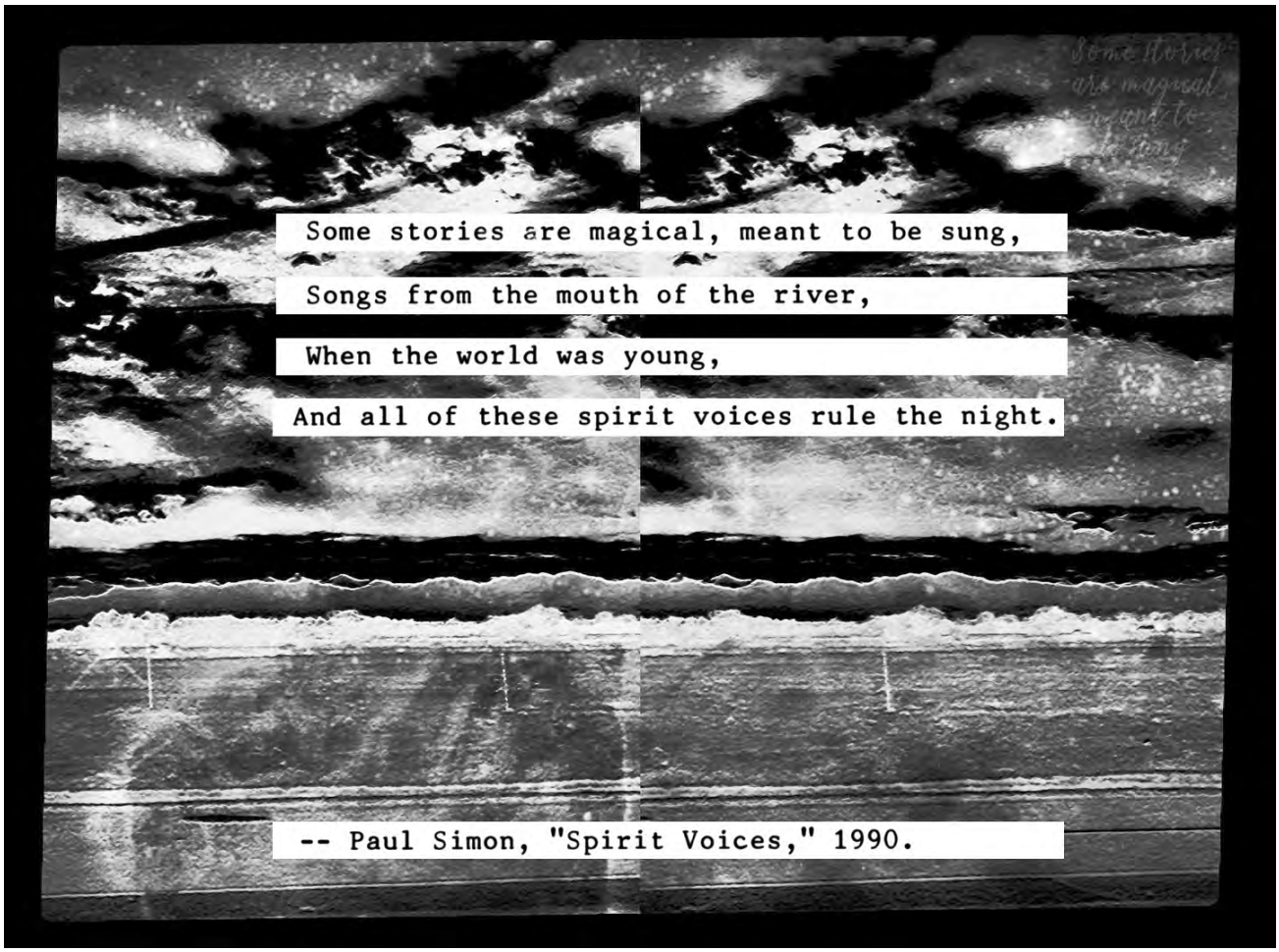


The Cocoa Circle

Number 104 | June 2018


Some stories are magical, meant to be sung,
Songs from the mouth of the river,
When the world was young,
And all of these spirit voices rule the night.
-- Paul Simon, "Spirit Voices," 1990.

July 5, 2018
8:02 p.m.
Papa Gino's Restaurant
@ Milkrose Center [corner table]
Milkrose, MA

"Some Stories are Magickal,
Meant to Be Sung."
– Paul Simon

– Some stories. Whose? Which ones?
Which ones not? Whose not?

Are some stories meant rather to be
spoken softly, shouted, wept?

Dusk coming on, hot & windless summer out.

Some stories meant to be written,
painted, danced? fondled, fucked, eaten?

Do some stories blow out of guns,
break young or old, human or
animal flesh?

Does the story "love all, praise all"
ever wrap down the centuries
with "feed & protect your own?"

Old story still a quiet mind-wound: I am down in North Carolina, visiting a girl I love, walking on empty woodsy road, & her mother calls [redacted] her on the phone, & this girl hushes me silent with a finger. I am an ongoing secret, that she still sees me, that her mother's command to cast me off hasn't been heeded. This happens on many of these visits, the hush to silence. One day, the command is heeded, or the love she had is gone, & I am cast off.

My mind wandered on that walk, odd to say. The trees were so beautiful around us, so large & lush. Mysterious. This aspect clings to this story too.

They affect each other, these two pieces. I was quiet, walked along quietly, as this hurtful, but inconsequential phone call carried on, & I looked at the trees. They were the story magickal to be sure! I haven't known of that girl in nearly three decades, am honestly indifferent to her date, as she no doubt is to mine, but those beautiful trees.

More recent story a fine mind-candy: Seattle, Washington, 2005, with my beloved Kassi, not even yet married. A Saturday night, juice-high, big bookstore. Her idea to make one of our Burning Man Books that year an anthology of modern women poets.

A small table. Maybe a big one. A great pile of poetry books. Individual poets' books & anthologies. Of the many we looked at we picked poems by 6 poets: Rich, Graham, Bishop, Atwood, Moore, Szymborska.

I remember thinking: I didn't know Margaret Atwood wrote poems, not just novels, & such good poems!

This is the small song of that magickal night reading those beautiful, fierce, strange, wild poems. Making a small book of those great singers. We read them on the pages, we spoke-sung them to each other. Beautiful songs

Some of the poems we picked that night are in this issue of The Cenacle :)

What if someone tells your story, & pretends to care?

What if he stands before thousands, & describes a hateful, diabolical world in which they are coming for you, coming to prevent you from feeding & protecting your own?

What if his strong man's act, his bluffs & boasts & blusters become a magical story-song for you, for others like you, at least they look like you & talk like you & are from around here too, & it feels deep down good to cheer him on, feels good, love him, praise him.

What if he pretended to care, & maybe they aren't so different, so deserving of his easy, mocking cruelty?

What if he really doesn't care, truly, consequentially, about you either?

What if his old mezmerizing song is a mind-wound inflicting upon you now & now & on & on?

Because we humans are conscious, we have language, we have memories, we have stories. Our stories are all magickal, & some we choose to sing.

Some songs nudge us nearer each other; some divide & conquer us better than bullets & border walls.

Sometimes we tell the stories. Sometimes the stories tell us.

Societies canonize some stories, rile their composers to make songs, & holidays to pause daily living to gather & sing them.

I told two story-songs, of the countless I have. You have countless too.

Story-songs grow, flourish, sometimes fade, in souls & societies both. My songbook is full of powerful ones, loves & deaths & events & hunts, whose ink is fresh & powerful on their pages. Others are fading, faded, nearly gone. By heart's irrational will & whim,

As you read this issue of The Cenacle, think sometimes of its many varied pieces as Magickal story-songs, meant to be sung. Which would you sing?

See if this idea sticks around, helps you add one more tool to your box of them intended to help you walk your days & nights, set the slow moving chaos/music about you.

Or sometime tell me you ways. What magicks & stories & musics in your life mean to you. How you reck all this.

Trees sing & tell their stories too. Squirrels, mosquitos, thunderstorms. Comets, black holes, imaginary lands, dreams & lusts, old songs, unknown noises in the night.

I'm still trying to figure those out too, as much as people.

All magickal. All meant to be sung- 2018

The Cenacle

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Edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

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- *Cenacles* #47-104
- Burning Man Books #1-72
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-18
- *RaiBooks* #1-8
- RS Mixes from "Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution"; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

Disk contents downloadable at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip.

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Thank you to Paul Simon for being the brilliant genius wizard minstrel you are . . . keep singing the magickal songs . . . & to One Medical Group's Amber for handling our panicked late night call with ease, competence, & kindness.

Scriptor Press
New England
2018

Feedback on Cenacle 103 | April 2018

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

A typical issue of *The Cenacle*:

- ✓ Kassi Soulard's lovely cover with a morning glory staring at us as if trying to remember our name;
- ✓ Raymond Soulard, Jr. gets his teeth bashed in and prays to wake up;
- ✓ Charlie Bayer smokes half a ton of weed while chewing apart a Colorado mountain for a measly few sapphires, but earns a special treat at the end;
- ✓ Tamara Miles continues her beautiful, sad family story with things that happened to her dad, and things her dad did;
- ✓ Judih Haggai breathes life into tiny desert poems;
- ✓ Ace Boggess is so crazy he writes letters to drops of water;
- ✓ Colin James drops pure language, and builds wooden cabinets crowded with trapdoors to ant nests in the sky;
- ✓ Jack Heitner climbs to the top of the poem, and sways, looking down at the world, clutching an antler on which is written the history of nature;
- ✓ Nathan Horowitz digs an outhouse pit, and breaks up with a girlfriend, before turning into an insect. In the background, out of the past, some crazy Buddhist Jew is howling; and
- ✓ Gregory Kelly is two crows in flight like unraveling balls of string.

* * * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

I love Ace Boggess's poem "Thanks for Ending Your Poems." I love the fact that there are acorns and endless squirrels to torment the speaker. I love the gentle questions, asking for blood and awe, the stuff good commercial poems are built from. Thank you, Ace.

I also enjoyed reading Tamara Miles's intricate, gently etched memoirs till that final muse: "If I give Dad mother issues, I have to grudgingly admit to father issues of my own, don't I?" And there you leave me to half-smile, and wait for the next installment, knowing that it could start at any point in your universe, and take off in any direction.

Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Many Musics* has this line: "I will become the answer to a question / you didn't have, it will consume us both." How I loved that my eye traveled down the lines till this one grabbed me to think, consider. This line that shakes up all the histories of all past lifetimes, and pulls up a few instances when this line was appropriate.

Shall I not mention that the attraction of Martina Newberry's poetical sketchings prove again to be powerful and slightly more sly. Her words penetrate, the images take hold, and I'm once again in her strange world, where shifts of opinion line up with the lack of answers to basic questions: *who am I? When do life events line up to make sense? Will there ever be a moment when I can sit comfortably drinking coffee and smiling with joy of planetary pride?*

* * * * * *

From Colin James:

I am enamored with the title of Ace Boggess's poem "Letter to a Droplet of Water"—and the poem itself is even more beautiful . . .

* * * * * *

From Gregory Kelly:

Jack Heitner's "Climbing"—that's the poem that hit home with me the most. Not only does it speak to an experienced adventure, but it also speaks to the adventure of soul searching, and grounds it in reality.

The poem's form mimics its content, and makes you feel as though you're climbing toward a self-realization where we search for love, and then find that who we are and what we do are the love that we seek.

We start at one point that is grounded. We move to discovery with each new crag. And then we come to the conclusion at the climb's summit. It's beautifully searching with its repetitious lists that are mining for more revelations. And it brings you on a splendid journey.

* * * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

I love Nathan D. Horowitz's descriptions of life in the jungle in "The Multicolored People of God." The little details of how to split a palm fond, or how to cook a deer with chili. The muddy trails through the jungle. I agree that *yagé* drinkers think they are "super-powerful, superenlightened, wiser than everybody else." Indeed, some think they are God.

But Horowitz mixes in the deeply personal, which I love. Which makes it all real. Things like his relations with his girlfriend. And sexism in the jungle culture that stems from fear of blood. Thanks for dipping me in this strange world.

* * * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Joe Ciccone's "Checked Out" takes a sharp jab at cultural obliviousness, and turns it into a stirring poetic meditation. I was drawn along by its ferocity but, in the end, felt sort of at peace with the modern world, and the differences with which we see it. Or don't see it, as the case may be. Quite loved this poem. Ciccone's writing always stands out.

* * * * * *

From Joe Ciccone:

In *Many Musics*, Raymond Soulard, Jr. takes us on a trip to the beginning of time to see how time ends, and it's OK to feel overwhelmed by it all. *What if the end game really is nothing more than the constant re-shuffling of ashes?*

If you think love is the one *real thing* that can survive, well then go for it, but remember that ambition is love's saboteur. The King failed the moment he put on the crown. His Queen failed the moment she called him King.

Read on, and live on, and if you get scared or overwhelmed take solace in knowing that this Island of Raymond's, like any island, in its constant struggle between being born and decaying, is probably not even there anyway. *Right?* Believe this, and perhaps you'll get some sleep tonight.

* * * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

Maybe it's the mood I'm in, coming home after a rare visit with my daughter, back to both of us rushing in our different directions to our different activities—but I'm a little melancholy, a little nostalgic, and I found Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Many Musics* poem "Remember Some Things," to be just right for settling in and swimming through these emotions. The speaker takes long strides in the cold water and thinks of the great Architect of her life, and the Architect asks her whether she will ever return to the Tangled Gate?

These questions correspond to recent questions in my life, since I have left the Southern Baptist church, and nearly left church altogether. I told my daughter I would be unlikely to ever go back to church, but today is a new day, and the church is a Tangled Gate, not a building. Church is a place where one goes to witness, or to observe the God within and the God without. I am now traveling more like the poem's speaker, packing "what little I treasured / in my Blue Suitcase, traveling / the far distance on the Mainland / to the shore of the

Wide Wide Sea." Thank you, Raymond, for helping me travel on, swim through, and "remember some things."

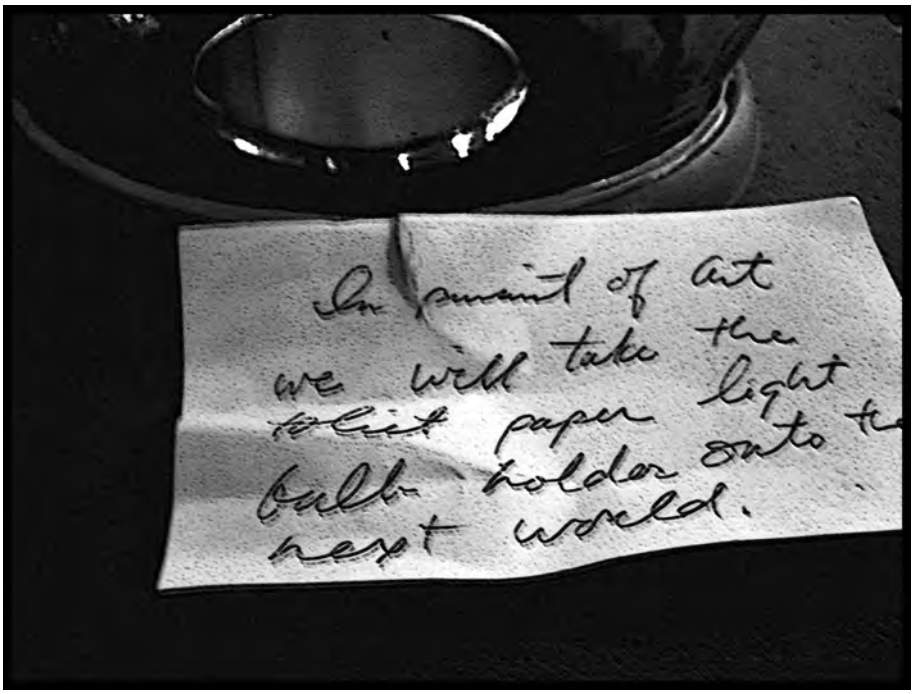
Jack Heitner: I climbed with you "[t]oward rocky outposts of the soul," where the falcons flash and the doves swoop, where "[i]ce falls crest on frozen rock waves." I climbed upward, out of myself and into the great beyond. I climbed with you "[u]p the red rock cliff," with its bold face, because "[s]ometimes guided by the peak / Sometimes trying firmer holds / We sometimes find the love we seek." At other times, we find, "[o]n Lamentation Mountain / In the green and shadowed deer park," an antler still carrying the clash of old fights, still carrying "[t]he sparks / from the wild hoofed rocks."

Nathan Horowitz: I needed "The Multicolored People of God," your marvelous travel journal— "down the river in Joaquin's new dugout canoe," and on the hike leading "to a grove of the right kind of palm trees." All the time, even when we wield the axe with no handle, we swing at our memories, we "hold on loosely," investigate "each memory, weighing, smelling, tasting, contemplating."

And Kassi! those images! *remarkable*. You so deftly captured that weeping willow in the light/dark of its weeping. I believe it revealed itself to you clearly and honestly.

Let's keep going, friends.

* * * * * *



諸国瀧廻り
木曽路奥
阿彌陀ヶ瀧

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Secret Joy Amongst These Times:
The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

"Think for yourself
& question authority."
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Eighteen
continued from
The Cenacle | 94 | October 2015

Read the full History at: http://scriptorpress.com/history_of_scriptor_press.pdf

In 2010, my life had big changes because of Kassi & I moving from Portland, Oregon to my old chosen hometown of metro-Boston, Massachusetts. I left Portland jobless—part of why I left—& continued jobless well into 2011. Sent out hundreds—more—of resumes—, & had dozens of phone & in-person job interviews. The economy still bad & my chosen profession of technical writer not the one skittish companies were hiring for much.

But I did get work by mid-year—albeit contract work; it paid, period. And while this was for awhile the year's biggest turn of events; then it wasn't. Wasn't even close. Jobs come & go. The sudden death of a dear, beloved friend is of a cosmic magnitude in comparison. The rise of a political movement in times of economic catastrophe is too.

I lost one of the best friends I've ever had—or will have—on December 1, 2011, & this made the rest of my circumstances good & bad seem virtually or completely unimportant. Art still mattered; Kassi too; but not much else.

The sudden & meteoric rise of Occupy Wall Street—& its relatively quick suppression by the Empire—had effects on the world nobody could have foreseen at the time. Occupy Wall Street brought hope when nobody had much.

Unlike 2010, which had consciously, intentionally arced toward our Boston move mid-year, 2011's arc was unanticipated. I tell it in advance of the year's narrative to marvel anew. Amaze at how life can shock like this, at any moment. Doesn't, most moments, but the possibility *is ever there.*

We began the year traveling up to Maine, 6th anniversary trip, become an annual event. January in Maine is un-peopled, since snowy, cold, beautiful, especially by the seaside. I schemed the year's coming work during these few idyllic days.

Back to Boston, Kassi back to her weekday commute to work, me to my jobless hours. Some of my time spent job hunting, but I could only do so much. Not many chances for work in dead of winter New England. So I worked at various writing & press projects.

SpiritPlants Radio left its online home at Yage.net after 7 years there. The Irishman Andy Dunn who owned Yage was shutting his server down. I suppose it was inevitable, but I was left to scrounge for a new host. I remember him kindly, & am grateful that he was willing to be involved for so long, hosting the station for no cost.

Found a new host in another friend known from cyberspace, Alfie Ilkins. Late January, SPRadio moved from Yage to Bluesphere. Scriptor Press, with same orphaned dilemma, moved to a paid site called Dreamhost. I used to panic much more about online hosting; it's become since 2011 much easier to find these services, & they are pretty low cost.

Cenacle 76 took me most of January to get ready for printing, mailing, & archiving. But that task too occurred, & copies were mailed out, along with Chris Gose's RaiBook *World's Window.* This was quite pleasing to get done. Final steps in a process that takes about two months for each issue.

As always, every Saturday Kassi & I journeyed to the movies, & I spent hours afterwards writing. I resumed the *Many Musics* poetry series after six months away, continued my *Labyrinthine* fixtion, & went deeper into reviving my *Bags End News* fantasy series. Of the first two, I weekly found myself writing new pages in the scant time before reading them during my "Within's Within" radio show on Saturday mornings. Fun to read fresh work but pressure-some too.

I think the stress of too many hours spent job hunting, & still trying to maintain my press projects, & new writing, finally tumbled me deep into a bad cold that lasted much of January. The problem I faced was that my jobless benefits would end in a few months, thus leaving Kassi vulnerable because of my failure to find work.

Too, though my Art is my way of being in this world, it does not pay bills or rent. Life summed to too much free time & too little income.

So it was snowy, blizzardy, day after day in January, & I was sick much of it. Sneezing, coughing, sleeping badly, & too weak to do much. These "stress" colds will hit me once in awhile, & no choice but to crawl on through till they pass.

And winter itself in New England, while beautiful & mysterious in many ways, can be debilitating to ambition. The hard cold temperatures can go on for weeks; the snow can make foot or vehicle travel slow & treacherous; the days are short & it seems the season won't ever leave.

The only thing to do is trudge on, day after day, make progress, & make sure to recognize it as such.

As the spring approached, nothing much changed but the weather. I began work on *Scriptor Press Sampler* 12 & *Cenacle* 77, typing, editing. I daily sent out emails & job-hunted. Weekends we journeyed to new movies, & I wrote at *Labyrinthine* fixtion & *Many Musics* poems.

Better & worse hours, as always, but the struggle persisted. It's like feeling bad was a norm I had to struggle up from. The best moments of writing, or times with Kassi, or old friends met again, were exceptions.

Why? Fear about money? *Yes*. The daily crush of rejection? *Yes*.

Maybe, deeper, the resentment that one cannot choose freely one's hours, how & where & why & who to spend them with. Money is a simple thing to blame, but money is the major, if not quite only, culprit. 2011 was a year where millions suffered around the world—lost homes, jobs, comfort, well-being, *because of money*. Because some, not a lot, in this world have land, possessions, food, shelter, *more than enough*, & the rest, the majority, struggle between somewhat & totally for their livelihood & sustenance.

So I was angry & felt helpless, like so many. At my best, I pushed these worries from me a bit, wrote, loved others & the world the best I could.

A recruiter friend of mine back in Portland, Anthony Miller, urged me to think of job hunting as a process, not a series of singular failures among stretches of silence. And I struggled to think through my days to a better emotional grounding. I wrote as deep within as I could to how I felt:

> *I was thinking how much of my life has been about rejection—from so small—my red hair—later my skin color—my body—jobs, romance—it hasn't ceased & here I am now, putting my value as a person down to employment—& punishing myself for not getting work—twisting inside my own trap—*

> *The opposing force has been Art—it has been where I found acceptance from myself & others—& a vent for frustrations—but then I have wasted so much time away from it—picking at the wounds by way of stress relief—*
>
> *So what then—I can't go back & act differently & feel better thereafter—A person's behavior is not monolithic nor is it consistent—any & most moments can be rife with what salves & what harms—there are no answers but how good & bad moments both cause momentum—& how I* cannot equate my worth with jobs

& then tried to find my way toward a living strategy that felt right, both *intellectually* & emotionally:

> *Thought: use this time as a working sabbatical from employment—instead of a freefall into depression—I've sent out many resumes this week—what if that's what I'm better doing—do that then rest of day mine?*
>
> *It could be the positive, even lucky, turn I've needed in my attitude—*
> *I need a job, yes—*
> *but here are these days—*
> *they pass whether I'm happy or not—*
> *they don't return—*
> *Am I capable of partitioning my life into two meaningful halves? Investing in both of them for as long as needed?*
> *Maybe.*

But then there was a day when I was at home, took a shit, clogged up the pipes, & spent hours up to my arms in my own shit, trying to clear the pipes & then clean up the mess on the floor & me. *This is how I felt at my worst.* Like the failure was my own, the pipes would never clear, & I'd never get it all cleaned up.

What's peculiar, & deeply lovely, is that while this messy job hunting stretch went on & on, something else was going on too: the making of *Cenacle* | 77 | April 2011. 16th anniversary issue, debuted at the 4/23/2011 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting.

It being the anniversary issue, my "From Soulard's Notebooks" comments at length upon this. I renew trying to understand why I do what I do with pens & Scriptor Press:

> *Art abounds, everywhere, all around, at least possibly. If me, then you, then anyone in this hotel lounge, on the streets, across the world. Art is our native water, all of us, why the simplest of us yearn to music, why we dream anarchically every night,* it is why we are conscious. To make Art.

These ideals don't come & go with my job-full or job-less times, when I've had romance or lost it, & lucky won it anew. What truth bides me & runs with my blood is thus:

> *Publishing—this periodical to me is an act of faith, my gesture of what I value to spend my hours with Art is what I believe in, what I preach. What hope, what direction. what purpose.*

There's a lot of wonderful poetry in this issue. There are lines that shine especially for me in this review.

In Joe Ciccone's "One Prayer," he writes:

Tonight my child tosses handfuls of chive
into the fire.
To her being an artist is an excuse for everything,
all heart and thumbs, rooted deeply in something.

& in his "All I Can Say" sequence he writes:

Before this house some trees.
Before the trees just ground.
Before the ground a house.
You better have religion.

The best of his poetry always seems to gesture wider, freer spaces of memory, feeling, & the music to sing these.

I interviewed Judih Haggai for this issue, as well as publishing a group of her new poems as usual. In the interview she says, "I write daily . . . for simplicity." Two of her poems particularly exemplify this goal:

dreams reveal
ancient connections
symbols speak

* * *

daylight prods dream
another chance to dance
with the hummingbird

Life's mysteries abound, lure, tantalize, but sometimes it would be nice to have one or two revealed. Would be useful, comforting. A reply of sorts to this wish in Ric Amante's "Roll Your Own":

Truth is, there is no answer—
questions masquerade as flower and bone.

If not answers, plain, best to form a strategy that "doesn't flinch" when the hour is hard, heavy. Best find good warning in ZMT's "The Sly Universe":

Beware the sly universe—it can snatch the cleats off your tap shoes in mid-air,
And the cushions off your old soft shoes when you land.

Nothing within or without are quite what they seem. So flow, & laugh a little more. Like Martina Newberry says in "Because You Lived":

Because you've lived
is reason enough to die.

Love stays on,
hunger stays on,
the sky stays on.
Real as grit,
you'll be here again

Or maybe what one arrives at is Tom Sheehan's assessment in "A Voice Touching":

Saturday touching
Sunday, acceptance,
being what you are
and where you're supposed to be.

Though I didn't know it at the time, *Cenacle* 77 features the thirtieth & last letter I would publish by my dear friend Jim Burke III. Titled "On the Death Penalty," it expressed Jim's long & deeply held opposition to capital punishment.

More an essay than a letter, as it delves into the history of the death penalty going back to Colonial North America, leading to this fiery & impassioned conclusion:

> *Finally, the death penalty is not, I repeat is not, a deterrent. The very fact that murders in this country occur on a daily basis proves that use of the death penalty is based on the revenge motive, and this also depends on the time and place of the crime and the trial. The execution of citizens by the states in this country is used to cover up the failure of our society as a whole to educate people equally and give all people an opportunity to better themselves . . . .*
>
> *I hope I live to see the day when our culture will transcend revenge, and rise above hate. Peace and love for all humanity would enable us to realize our spiritual potential, which is God-like. John Lennon had it right after all.* ***IMAGINE!***

It was one of our last collaborations. Jim wrote it, mailed it to me. I researched his facts, footnoted where required, made sure it presented his thoughts best as possible. I was very proud of his work, & happy to play the editor's role on it. He wrote this letter on March 17, 2011, the day before his birthday, & died that year on December 1. His body was weakened by years of health struggles, inability to get the care he needed while earning his living for himself & his daughters, yet Jim's mind was sharp & beautiful as ever.

Ralph Emerson's "R is for Rambo" linguistics essay is another delight. It think it is nicely summed by these lines early on:

> *"About three hours into this expedition," says nature writer John Hanson Mitchell, "I came upon a mountain stream. Actually, I heard the stream before I saw it, a* dark, throaty growl *that filled the trees and evolved into a deafening* roar *as I approached." Following the "*rushing *waters" to the edge of a cliff, the writer scrambled down the rocks and sat "at the base of the falls, contemplating the awesome force of the cascade of green water, the immense overwhelming* roar.*"*
>
> *Noise, speed, and commotion: a perfect R experience.*

I also like these lines:

> *But the deep psychology of language is pre-industrial. Our distant ancestors never heard jets or bullet trains. Lions, thunder, wind, whitewater* rapids*, and angry warriors were their only emblems for*

> *overwhelming speed and noise. Concepts as important as those were apt to be embodied in human speech very early, mnemonically linked to specific sounds and further linked whenever possible to images of water and sex.*

The challenge of Emerson's work is to put familiar clothes on matters of mechanics & psychology, draw clear pictures where history often obscurely bisects the great weird force that are the physical facts of humans living daily & messily among humans. He does this very well.

My "Notes from New England" does not touch in the least directly on my job struggles. Instead I study into more than I had before the matter of dreams & dreaming. Using the same kind of single-topic-but-nonlinear structure I'd employed in *Cenacle* 76's J.D. Salinger *NNE* piece, I weave together multiple sections through the use of prose commentary, a number of my new *Many Musics* dream poems (which appear elsewhere in the issue), the dream journal passages which inspired these poems, & divide one section from the next by graphic artwork of Kassi's created for this purpose.

Here's a couple of examples pointing toward the heart of this piece:

> *Maybe dreaming is simply like floating in the ocean forever: one never has to get out & go to work a job, or search fruitlessly for one, or sit in front of a frowning doctor, or worry about people & animals & lands perishing in stupid nuclear reactor disasters, or preventable floods, or wars. There are storms, calm dawns, & stretches lonely & those with others near—but nobody & nothing is unimportant, considered disposable. Nothing lasts but nothing is lost.*
>
> *To give dreams their full due is to acknowledge a* continuation *of consciousness, into dream-space (into psychedelic space too), not an* un*consciousness at all. The mind does not cease thinking even as the body, while at rest, continues its basic functions.*
>
> *I believe dreams mean something, many things, like everything means something. Some cultures—like Native American tribes, & the Senoi of Malaysia—place a greater important on dreaming, dream interpretation, dream-wisdom. A materialist, fear-driven society, like the current American one, shies away from dreams, their mysteries, their seeming lack of immediate usefulness, or easy integration into its perpetual production-consumption-waste cycle. Dreams pose too many questions, offer too many answers, trade in both easy & obscure regrets, familiar & forbidden desires. Dreams breach space & time, are beyond anarchy because they have* no *accepted order against which to rebel.*

I pushed my study & use of my dreams deeper in 2011 because, honestly, my poetry was burnt out & uninspired. I'd stopped writing any halfway through 2010, after 30 years at it. I needed to find a new approach to care again.

So I went into the dream journal I'd been keeping daily since 9/28/2009. I found all sorts of evocative, weird, obsessive, surreal material. But how to wield it, render it poetry? My first dozen-plus attempts are in this issue, but I wanted to do more. So I decided to turn *NNE* into my laboratory of sorts. Write out my thoughts at length, see what that was like, how it felt. Use a smattering of references to others regarding dreams & dreaming. Raise my stakes on all this by using pages in *The Cenacle* to pursue it.

The Cenacle is where my best work, & what I am spending my best hours on, arrives. It's where the messy living of 2-3 months coheres into a beautiful book. A book I hand to friends, mail to friends, distribute online. Every issue is me in full costume, on stage, opening night, there to give it my all.

Oddly, *Labyrinthine* contains pages several years old that do address my joblessness. Oh, there are surely aliens, Beasts, mystical Woods, surreal sexual grapplings, merry & mad rantings alike, but the passages that express best my daily struggles of 2011, though written in 2008 are these:

> *Universe, I ask, I beg, I wish. Please help me on this course. Please help me. I remember my father telling me he'd pray to his mother in hard times. I pray to you now, whatever you are beyond a stone & a box of bones 3,000 miles from here. Whatever you were. Help me. My story, this book, is raw & vulnerable in this asking, yet I ask. Help me to succeed & soon in this task. To find good work as I had before taken away by accountants, more loyal work.*

I quote this passage because I believe good writing *counts*, spends deeply the hours that occupy the act of doing it, & someone reading it. I am in & among my pages always, whether visibly or not. I don't say this is the only way, but I do say it is *my way.*

The featured classic fiction in this issue is Nathaniel Hawthorne's brilliant "Artist of the Beautiful" published in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846, 1854) & republished in the Burning Man Books series in 2000. This story is bafflingly realistic & fanciful both. I love the following passage of Hawthorne's as beautiful & romantic & weird as any in literature:

> *But the innate tendency of his soul had only been accumulating fresh vigor during its apparent sluggishness. As the summer advanced he almost totally relinquished his business, and permitted Father Time, so far as the old gentleman was represented by the clocks and watches under his control, to stray at random through human life, making infinite confusion among the train of bewildered hours. He wasted the sunshine, as people said, in wandering through the woods and fields and along the banks of streams. There, like a child, he found amusement in chasing butterflies or watching the motions of water-insects. There was something truly mysterious in the intentness with which he contemplated these living playthings as they sported on the breeze or examined the structure of an imperial insect whom he had imprisoned. The chase of butterflies was an apt emblem of the ideal pursuit in which he had spent so many golden hours; but would the beautiful idea ever be yielded to his hand, like the butterfly that symbolized it?*

Lastly, Terence McKenna's essay, "Eros & the Eschaton," derived from a 1994 lecture in Seattle, Washington. I've ready many of McKenna's books & heard hundred of hours of audio from his lectures, & think that much of what he says is summed in this essay's penultimate paragraph:

> *I think we have to abandon Western cultural values and return to the deeper wisdom of the body in connection with the plants. That's the seamless web that leads us back into the heart of nature—and if we can do this, then this very narrow neck of cultural crisis can be navigated. Very little of the past can be saved. The architectonics, the machines, the systems of monetary exchange and propaganda, the silly religions, the asinine aesthetic canons, very little of that can be saved. But what can be saved is the sense of love and caring, and mutuality, that we all put into and take from the human enterprise. You know, there's a Grateful Dead song that says, "You can't go back and you can't stand still. If the thunder don't get you, then the lightning will." And we now hold, through the possession of these psychedelics, catalysts for the human imagination of sufficient power that if we use them we can deconstruct the lethal vehicle that is carrying us toward the brink of apocalypse. We can deconstruct that vehicle and redesign it into a kind of starship that would carry us and our children out into the broad starry galaxy we know to be awaiting us.*

The pictures in this issue are all striking & delightful as usual but of especial note is Kassi's colored cover, taken in Ogunquit, Maine, & looking like some sweet oil painting from the 19th century or longer ago.

The 4/23/2011 JG meeting where *Cenacle* 77 debuted was an especially good one in that the in-person guests included Jim Burke III (up from Connecticut), Ric Amante & Melissa Wattenberg (local), & our dear friend Victor Vanek, come to visit from Portland just in time for meeting #116. This

was the first meeting where I had in person friends who'd started coming to the JG during its original manifestation (CT 1988-2001), its Portland version (2008-2010) & its current Boston version.

I was thrilled that the *Cenacle* I'd brought was a really good one to hand round & read from. Jim read his death penalty essay from the issue, & played lots of guitar. We read writings by Rilke, Merwin, Neil Gaiman, Peter S. Beagle, Ralph Ellison, & our new friend Tom Sheehan. Jim & Ric even read poems from really old *Cenacle*s. KD & I were running on no sleep, but this meeting was fantastic. Much salve to my ongoing jobless worry. There were also videos from Judih Haggai, AbandonView, & Martina Newberry.

On the 28th, I turned 47, but it didn't mean much to me save that I was 30 years removed from when I was 17 &, in my own lingering thoughts since, perfect. My best & worst still mostly in chrysalis.

More meaningful was May 4, which marked 37 years of me doing my journal, my first writing project. I was so struggling & yet believed writing was my answer & salvation no matter what. Writing my thing, part of Art as a whole. I wrote in my journal about this time:

> *Now, this question of May 4—seems to me my issue in part is that I don't write enough because my mind & senses have narrowed over time—what I want to do is write more because my doors are wider open again—*

Just over a week later, the hook on my life pulled deep into the water, & took a few days, but it took, & I landed work on May 18. *Scored*. Project editor job at United HealthCare. Working remotely with people all over the country. It had been a year since my last contract, back in Portland. I was stunned, ecstatic. Nothing good I had done during the year of joblessness could long comfort me or distract me from this crisis. *Thankful beyond words.*

It had been nearly two years since I'd gone to Burning Man, assembled the No Borders Free Bookstore. For awhile around this same time, I played with the idea of renaming the series TransArtsBooks, & working toward a 2012 launch. The Bookstore idea never left me, never lost its lure & charm in my mind & heart. (I can say now that Burning Man Books 2016 occurred, & Burning Man Books 2019 currently pends.)

Though late in finishing, *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 12 | *2010 Annual* was done & announced on May 20, in the ecstatic wake of getting work. It features poetry by Joe Ciccone, Ric Amante, Tom Sheehan, Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor, Judih Haggai, Martina Newberry, & me; fictions by G.C. Dillon & Horse Lampner; my fixtion *Labyrinthine* in excerpts; prose by Ralph Emerson, Jim Burke III, Alex Smith, & Dave King; my J.D. Salinger tribute, & graphic arts by Victor Vanek & me & KD.

While always trying to figure out how to wider distribute *SPS*, I did manage to bring a couple of dozen copies to Ric's & Melissa's 5/25/2011 Out Loud Open Mic event. And Ric, Melissa (ZMT), Tom Sheehan, & I all read our works from it.

Though a contract job, UHC's stresses & strains, its expectations of my time & skills, & attention, these were all no less than a full-time job. And me tender & worn from a year of joblessness, I put more pressure on myself to do well. The details of the job first unfolded in several days of technical training, & then in applying new-learned tools to actual work.

What I was doing then, what I still do now, is

apply my trained ability to move words around in a mechanical environment. It's both challenging & simple, strange & tedious. I do it because it pays well, better by far than the bookstore jobs I'd prefer. I'm married, I owe lot of student loan money. And it's mostly painless work that leaves my nights & weekends free for Art, pays for them.

So as I learned this job involving knowledge bases & decision trees & computer programs like Dreamweaver, I was during those nights & weekends happily busy in a different world; still involving, strange to realize, moving words (& images & audio) around in a mechanical environment, but this to create & disseminate Art.

Took me weeks to get *Cenacle* 77 & *SPS* 12 finalized, printed, & distributed by mail, made into PDF files & distributed online. Working challenging & simple, strange & tedious.

I was also getting SpiritPlants Radio ready for its scheduled weekend broadcasts, including making & airing my own show live on Saturday mornings.

And I was edging into the work involved in making *Cenacle* | 78 | June 2011. Writing & typing my several pieces, plus reading contributors' works, deciding what fit best the new issue.

Had a visit with Joe Ciccone & Ric Amante, two of my very favorite people, & poets, & all of our wives. Joe's a urologist now, lives with his family in a large & lovely house in suburban Boston. He's still who I've always known &, like an evolving tree, more & other too. Ric too. Myself, I guess. I have a picture of us, huddled, smirking. Looking at it now feels like suddenly sniffing a longlost scent.

All this work, the heavy writing & editing sessions nights & on weekends, leading up to *Cenacle* 78 & the 6/24/2011 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting. A last of its kind, though I could not have known it then.

* * * * * *

Leia Friedman

Same Same Shackles, But Different

[Travel Journal]

"The important thing is to not stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence.
One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality.
It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day."
—Albert Einstein

i.

Ever since I was a child, I loved to write. In other words, since my frontal lobe acquired the skill for language composition, and my fine motor function developed to the extent that I could grasp a writing implement and produce squiggled shapes on bleached and processed tree pulp, that would be recognized and interpreted by other organisms who also understand the combination of markings. I loved to write.

For most of my life I have sporadically created travel musings and essays, normally to capitalize on some kind of universal truth observed amidst the shockingly different cultures and sceneries I hungrily moved through.

The readily available pocket-skyweb-picture-taking device impedes my travel writing. When I see something beautiful, unique, ironic, absurd, I don't take notice of the fine details like I used to (in the days before one could swipe a thumb up, press the white dot on the black glass, and look elsewhere). I remember traveling to Canada as a child, then Prague, Israel, Italy, Mozambique, Brazil, Jamaica, Peru, Latvia, and attempting to immortalize every last tiny detail of something so that I could write about it later. I would try to burn the image, the scent, the feeling, the sound into my brain.

Walking back home, I would repeat the descriptive phrases over and over in my head, in rhythm with my slapping footsteps, fearing that they would slip away before I could pen them into permanence.

OK, I left out taste. At that time I had not yet taken up the annoying habit of trying to articulate an analysis of every food and drink I tried. Alas, here in Vietnam, among so many kind and curious people, no one has the grasp of English (or perhaps the cultural patience) to hear my fumbling attempts at identifying coriander, umami, citrus, or fish broth. And MSG, the little devil. It sneaks its way into every dish.

ii.

I am staying with a Vietnamese family in the mountain town of DaLat, 190 miles north of Ho Chi Minh City, in the southern highlands of Vietnam. I type gently on my laptop, not wanting to wake Elly and her mom, who are napping in the next room.

Elly is chipper, super petite, outgoing, and kind. She's 23 years old, studying business in Singapore, and she has come home for Tết, the Vietnamese New Year's holiday. "*Chuc Mung Nam Moi*," says everything in the streets and common areas. This holiday is like Christmas, your birthday, and New Year's combined, in a week-long celebration.

We connected via Couchsurfing.com, a social media platform where travelers can come into

contact with locals to share food, drinks, and stories—possibly to be afraid of getting molested because you're meeting a stranger from the Internet—or maybe to observe that stranger being afraid of you molesting them because they're meeting a stranger from the Internet—and even to be hosted for free, as I am so graciously experiencing now.

So I'm sipping a freshly pressed sugarcane juice in this not-stranger's hammock. I bought one for each of us, a total of 12,000 VND (VND = Vietnamese dong; One American dollar = 22,500 VND; so the juices were around 30 cents each). It is dark yellow-green and murky, in a thin plastic cup filled with so much ice that droplets continuously form and drip down the ribbed exterior.

I can smell the coconut oil I put under my arms earlier. Your skin heats up in the sun, and the warmth melts the oil from your pores. The wafting combination is summery. Islandy. It reminds me of the radiant, dark, lovely yogi I met in Costa Rica, from whom I learned this practice (the practice of coconut oil: everywhere, everyday, for everything, and putting a cheeky new meaning to the O.T. Genasis song "I'm in love with the coco").

iii.

This morning Elly and her mom, Luan, went to the market and bought groceries for us to make a traditional meal. They walked in with faces full of morning exhilaration, carrying bags of greens, enormous flowers wrapped in newspaper (the stems are, conservatively, three feet long), and pork meat (including chuck bits of meat with bone and sinew from a part of the animal that I don't recognize). I have waited for this experience in Vietnam. My travels have so graciously led me to the kitchens of many mamas who generously share their secret magic with me. We waste no time getting started.

Downstairs, Luan squats over a wooden cutting board on the floor, square butcher knife in hand, striking the pork in even and calculated movements. Her Achilles tendons must be so limber. Her butt nearly brushes the floor, yet her spine is straight and heels are flat on the ground. Her knees are two open butterfly wings, making space for her arms to work on pulverizing the meat.

She was in a hammock when we first met, twirling a black-beaded dreadlock that snaked out from beneath her black hair. Later we realized we were reading the same obscure book, and our connection only grew as we ran into each other again and again in Costa Rica, at both "costas" (meaning coasts: *el pacifico y el caribe*). Later, on a road trip across the U.S., she hosted my travel companion and me in her lovely apartment in Chicago. She has since moved down to Costa Rica to work with the coconuts full time.

She adds green onion and garlic to this mince pile and continues to hack away. She thinly slices a crisp yellow potato and then cuts that into strips, combining it with the meat mixture in a white and blue ceramic bowl. On top she sprinkles salt, sugar, chicken stock, MSG, and black pepper. These spices come from identical glass jars; I learn what they are by smelling and tasting a pinch of each after she adds it to the bowl. At the MSG I cringe and think: "well, when in Rome . . ." She squeezes a piece of lime over the top of the spices, and a dash of fish oil (she has watched me taste each thing and when I reach for the fish oil she makes a disgusted face and won't let me have it). She mixes it in expert movements with two wooden chopsticks.

I'm sitting on a tiny stool, since my hips can't understand this working at the bottom of the squat thing. The Vietnamese don't have the same affinity, reliance, fondness, I don't know, for chairs and horizontal surfaces. In this spacious two-bedroom apartment, there is not one proper chair or table.

It isn't for lack of funds, or carelessness. Lots of fancy, decorative items adorn the public areas in Vietnam; benches and tables simply are not among them. Men sleep on their motorcycles amidst bustling traffic and a cloud of petrol emissions. Everywhere I've stayed, there has been little to no counter space, and at restaurants the Vietnamese typically sit on what I would previously have referred to as a baby's stepping stool. I've grown fond of having my knees in my armpits while I hunch over my Pho. I'm not sure if I can go back to having soup with my legs bent at 90 degrees.

I'm following Elly's lead, rolling this meat mixture into rice paper (spring rolls!) while Luan works the stove prepping the soup, rice, and omelet of fried spring onion and duck eggs. I watch her lovingly wash an enormous bucket of mixed greens in the sink, once, twice, thrice, until she slices the stems while running cold water over them.

The kitchen is full of sounds and smells and affection, for the food and for this shared experience. While frying the spring rolls in soybean oil, we stew the pork bits in soybean oil with red onion, garlic, chili, and more of the spices. The pot spits lethal oil droplet firecrackers at my face for a few moments until we add hot water. Luan washes the rice in the rice cooker with the same tender hand motions, once, twice, thrice. Her face is smooth and solemn, and her eyes appear closed as she gazes down. When she isn't using a hand, she tucks it behind her back like a Top Chef. She and Elly chatter incessantly in Vietnamese.

I suddenly miss my mom, as she would appreciate this situation. I remember her humorous insecurity at the nail salon, wondering what the Vietnamese nail technicians were saying to each other ("*are they talking about my feet? They're definitely talking about my feet*"). Such is the communication style of women in this culture—a pleasant, unending stream of trilled, smiling Vietnamese. There is no way to know if it's about your feet or not. Perhaps that ignorance is bliss.

iv.

Soon everything is ready, and we carry it upstairs, assembling three floor mats around a child's play table. The table displays a perfect lesson for me: the alphabet, the days of the week, and the months of the year are all written in Vietnamese with English underneath. It is covered in some sort of laminate that's peeling off of Mickey Mouse's gleeful face. Right on time, aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents arrive at the front door, and spill into the kitchen.

Wooden chopsticks poised, I wait and copy-cat my way through. The spring rolls are first—golden brown and crispy, bursting with savory, slippery filling. We dip them in a fish sauce, filled with floating bits of diced garlic and chili. The soup is steaming and mildly flavored. The greens are the star of that show, a delight of taste and texture.

We sip on the blackberry wine they made six months ago, the last time they were in DaLat. All they did was put a few cups of blackberries in a plastic jug with some sugar and covered it. Now the berries have fermented and produced this drink, so sensual and rich. We smile at using our spoons to fish through the crushed ice for dregs of blackberry flesh. The duck egg omelet is bright orange, and I shred it into pieces and add it to my soup and rice like Luan. It has a springy texture, and the fried green onions in it are crunchy. I think about how cooked egg is a nice addition to hot soups.

I feel weird saying that, because in Bali I was eating vegan and so content with it. Going with the flow there was so easy. There were lots of delicious vegan spots with so much amazing food to try. Sometimes it's hard to flow while adhering rigidly to any sort of diet when you're traveling in new places. Especially alone. It's not an excuse, because I could do it (and there are a few great veggie restaurants here in DaLat), but more of an explanation. I'm taking things on a day-to-day basis, and I enjoy the bond of sharing in these experiences with Elly and her family. I don't feel as good when I'm eating meat and dairy. The best I've ever felt physically was when I wasn't having any animal products. All of this is part of my path to knowing how I want to live, I tell myself.

After we clean everything up, Elly and her mom lay down together on their "bed" (a super firm mat no more than an inch thick; I've done ab workouts on softer surfaces than this). I squat and wash my laundry in a bucket, trying to be Vietnamese but standing up with a groan not even two minutes later.

When I'm through with scrubbing and ringing out each item like I learned in Africa, I hang my things on wire hangers suspended from the chainlink fence covering their back window. I wonder if they'll be dry by tomorrow as I have very few warm clothing items here, and it is already past midday

so the hot morning sun has dissipated. There's a light breeze, so I'm hopeful but without expectation.

I always feel like I do the bucket laundry thing wrong, and I'll never know because I'm always too embarrassed to ask. *How can a woman not know how to wash her clothes?* I worry that someone will think: "Oh, because she has a machine that does it for her. I hear she even has one that dries everything, too! What does she do with all that extra time on her hands?" At least I can wash and dry a sink full of dishes in minutes flat, I tell myself. *Are the mid-twenties a time of telling yourself all these things?*

v.

I want to nap but I hear myself saying it will be better to walk off all of the oil and pork and rice I just ate. I don't want to gain weight. I've been thinking a lot about cultural differences that are actually not differences but parallels of underlying themes. Since spending time with Elly and other Vietnamese, Chinese, Balinese, and Indian peers, I've noticed that we share different societal shackles. "Same same, but different," goes the favorite throwback Southeast Asian saying. *Same same shackles, but different*.

In my case, needing to walk before I can let myself rest is the notion of "you must do this to be more attractive" or "you will be [more] unattractive if you don't do this." Fatness is a concern, a phenomenon that receives peoples' attention in the Western world. There is a heightened awareness about calories, portions, exercise, clothing size, etc., in my own culture.

A good friend in Bali asked me, when I got home from CrossFit training, "You are so fit, but why are you still fat?"

Another friend in Ho Chi Minh City, when she learned I had been a dancer and a dance teacher, said, "But how can you be a dancer when you are fat?" Then she corrected herself by saying, "Well, not really fat, but medium?"

In Thailand, my massage teacher was demonstrating a movement on me in front of the class. She stopped suddenly and asked me, "Are you pregnant?"

"No," I said, embarrassed.

"Oh, OK, just—" (she bounced arms in front of her belly like holding a basketball). The other white women in the class were mortified with me.

All of these people were sweet, polite, careful not to offend in any way. In Asia, being fat is just another way of looking, not *the worst thing ever* like where I come from.

Tan is something you can be in the Western world (that some people want to be, in fact). Here, on the other hand, you could comb every pharmacy and never find sunscreen that doesn't have skin whitener in it. In Elly's house, there is soap at every sink that says "Whitening Power X10." Before going out, she and her mother dust themselves in a thin coat of white powder.

Most of the women here wear gloves, face-masks, wide brimmed hats and socks with their sandals. I watched this and found it ridiculous. "These women are enslaved by an unreachable cultural standard!" I told myself, looking around and wondering if anyone else noticed the insanity.

This standard affects men as well. My friend in Bali said that only foreigners would date him because "Balinese don't like black people" (he is a few shades tanner than the average Balinese person). What a thing, that people who live in a place where the sun will burn you to a crisp by 8:30 AM are afraid of being tan!

Then a little voice inside me whispered, "Hey . . . you . . . do you not also buy into your own oppression?" Stone in hand, I looked around at my glass house. *What was my reality furnished with?* Coming from a country with the largest portion meals, in restaurants and homes—where food is glamorized and sexualized—and the supermarkets are full of processed garbage—hormones and antibiotics fed to the animals we eat from the factory farms—*and the biggest craze is being skinny*.

vi.

My brain has hosted incessant thoughts, constant obsessions, about food and thinness since I could code memories. As early as preschool, I have memories of looking at the squished flesh bulging out of my navy blue tights, the fat sandwich that happens to your inner thighs when you sit on your knees, and thinking that 1) boys would not like that and 2) if I ate less, it wouldn't happen anymore.

As my cognitions became more mature, it was the ratio of my macros (too many carbs! too much fat! not enough low-glycemic index vegetables!), calories burned (guilty that I ate a donut last night and now I don't want to go out for a run at 6AM), and clothing sizes (my spandex are a little looser, maybe if I keep skipping lunch like the last few days, I'll be even thinner!).

Should I become vegan? Should I do a whole 30? Reductio ad absurdum. Is this not identical to people who live on the equator making every effort to be pale?

The underlying cause is stupidly obvious to me: money. Industry needs demand in order to survive. Create demand for a product by showing people that they need it. If you can capitalize on people's tendency to feel inadequate, then offer them a way out, you'll be guaranteed a lifetime of customers. The more people there are who feel like there's something wrong with them, the more people will search out a way to fix that. Hence, a market is created for skin bleach, or diet pills, plastic surgery, and perpetual self-discontent.

vii.

I took a "countryside tour" with a tour guide who was quite a comic, lots of dry humor making fun of people and society. We were in the middle of a row of orchids on a flower farm, and there was netting over us that mostly shaded the sun. I asked if the women and girls (who were squatting in the common fashion as they picked flowers) wore face-masks to prevent breathing in the pollen all day.

He shook his head and clicked his tongue, explaining that even though we were in the shade, the sun can still tan you, "and then you look like poor and work the field. You know, lots Vietnamese women, they want to make the plastic surgery. They have short legs, wanna make the legs long so stretching them. They have teeth that stick out like roof. Wanna make push the teeth down. Have a big nose, only good thing for this is can smoke in the shower. They go to Korea and make nose beautiful and small. And the eyes. Vietnamese women smile and can't see sky no more. Need to make the surgery, for eyes to becoming round."

The rest of the group was silent. Eager for debate, I asked, "and what happens if a woman doesn't want to change those things about herself?"

He looked out at the field for a long time, perhaps trying to come up with another joke, or perhaps because he had never considered the possibility of a woman not wanting to undergo a painful leg stretching procedure. "Not getting married. This woman ugly and not find husband."

Right away, I said sarcastically, "and a woman's highest objective is to find a husband, right?"

He patted me on the back and continued telling us about how the flowers get packed up and shipped all the way to Holland.

* * * * * *

1CPT 20

Martina Newberry

Her Face, on a Prayer Card

"the feathery hiss of an inrushing spirit"
—Lorenzo Lotto

She lavishes desperate praises
prior to the onset of fear
sloshing around in her head.

Her brainstem, she says,
is folding inward, her ideas
have become wasps, stinging,
then sleeping in the cold dark,
then waking again to sting.

Her hope is to transform–
a tree, a flowering bulb, a fern.

It's about hoping hard enough,
wanting it badly enough,
knowing it will happen instead
of wishing it would–-
so say the Wishcraft Reverends
and the Priests of Positive Thinking.

She lavishes desperate praises
to those around her, hopes
with them for miracles.

She never knew she was Divine.
She has never seen her face
on a prayer card. No one ever told her.

* * *

I Closed Your Book, All Your Books

"He's from the Iowa Writers Workshop
and can therefore get along fine
without my attention."
—John Brehm

If I told you how your wounded words
entered me like a sexual penetration,
assured—purposefully—

I think you would call it love.

If I described how shamelessly I drank wine
all night and how drops of it fell
on the pages of *you*
and how freely
I let you harvest me hollow,

you would say that hero worship doesn't
interest you; the same overweening way
altruism has never interested you.

You called it "malarky"—said it bored you.

I turned page after page, lifted my
ambitious pink dress over my head
in some mad attempt to see if

nakedness cleared the way for understanding.

Each line accused me, vexed me, made me
envious. The ones that spoke of death
embarrassed me. Finally,

I closed your book, all your books.

I thought of the foolishness of words–
how they never stopped wars,
how describing sex, finding

new words about sex, wasn't sex, how who you
are/were has never lived up to your
literary success.

Finally, I closed your book, all your books.
And that, like the rest of it—like snowy white paper
and invisible ink—

meant so little—almost nothing.

* * *

2018

It's been a bad year for everyone,
that's what I think. It's been a bad year
for the country, for the weather, for
fish, for oceans, for old people, for
homeless old people, for armies and
alliances, for cigar smokers and strumpets.

I've been bothered by this
enough to make me crazier than
they say I am. So, I walked over
to Hollywood and Highland, stood in
side the entrance to the red line to
take it all in. People walked around,
dithered, flitted like uncommitted
tiger moths.

I watched a tall woman
in fringed boots carrying sunflowers
in her bag. It looked to me like her
feet hurt. It made me sad for her but
then I thought *Hell! It's been a bad year
for everyone*.

* * *

Village Swallows from Austria (After Josef Strauss)

When you read this, I'll be inside my apartment
watching the cat who is watching the birds
who are watching and sniggering at the squirrels
who are clacking at the mice running across
the patio avoiding the ants who are too busy
to watch anything. When you read this,
remember that it all started with a window
and a cat.
If there was music, it would be a waltz.

* * * * * *

John Barton

The Millennial Artist's Omelette

[Classic *Cenacle* Essay]

"There is a secret joy amongst these times . . . "
—Raymond Soulard, Jr., "Millennial Artist's Survival Guide," 1998.

preamble/preface/prelude/presentiment

Yeats had a theory of time, history, and spirit, which he summed up in a single word: "gyre." He believed in the Druidic interpretation of nature, of the self and the not-self, of past and future, of sun and moon, of man and woman, of life and death. The extremes of reality lurk at the edges as, of course, they should, while everything else dances "betwixt," to use Yeats' own word.

The Druids used a symbol sort of like a lazy 8 infinity sign, except this horizontal 8 contains a spiral in each of its two lobes. The spiral unravels out from the center of one lobe, then curves up, over and down to spiral in toward the center of the other. A Moebius strip in two dimensions. This is the visual end of Yeats' gyre.

While the Druids sometimes employed three lobes (could this explain the Celtic attachment to the similarly shaped clover?), signifying, it is thought, the two poles of existence, as well as the "betwixt," as in past-present-future, Yeats stuck with the standard lazy 8 version. He then expanded the concept to cover . . . everything. He described history in terms of the gyre. Thus his famed "Second Coming" poem about the Millennium (which fascinated Yeats) with lines like: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold".

The historical application of Yeats' gyre operated on a millennial basis so, truly, in Yeats' mind, the "rough beast [which] slouches toward Bethlehem" has some equivalent in our history and should be arriving quite soon. Its purpose? To overthrow the Christian paradigm and replace it with something pagan (Yeats' "Leda and the Swan" is about the same topic): Christ is out, Zeus and the Olympians are back in.

Some might dread the approach of an un-Christian and pagan era. Not so Yeats. Nor me either. What is the "secret joy amongst these times"? I'm looking forward to finding out!

i.

"Days the undirected ships & dreams revelations of continuous crashings"
—Raymond Soulard, Jr., "Millennial Artist's Survival Guide," 1998.

Something ends, and the Western world experiences *fin de siècle*; but if something ends, then something else begins. Is Father Time's hourglass half empty or half full? The Christians choose to be pessimistic; l don't. At this transitional time, all is in flux, there are "undirected ships & dreams," and "crashings" are as inevitable as the course of the sun.

Our planet Earth, though, revolves around the sun, and not the other way around. We know that now, as even the Church acknowledged sometime in this decade when it announced it had erred in contesting with Galileo's theory. Well, then, the writing must be on the wall if Popes can admit to their own fallibility after four or five centuries. Good-bye, Christianity—you'll still be around, of course,

since you're part of humanity now and forever, and won't ever go away for good, but you're not the same old girl these days, and a lot more days like these are a-comin'.

If the glass resting on Father Time's palm is half empty, then we must greet our new Millennium with dread, foreboding, and plenty of wanton destruction, so as to do our best to usher in the Armageddon for which the religiously insane are praying. *Look out, Jerusalem!* There is, indeed, something called "Jerusalem Syndrome," whereby a hapless tourist of the Holy Land becomes emotionally overwhelmed and overwrought, losing touch with reality and conceiving himself (or, more rarely, herself) to be some figure out of the Bible striding forward into mythology and deeds of, well, divine proportions. Will Israel's "Millennium Squad" be up to the challenge and stave off Doomsday? Let's hope.

If we hope, indeed, that the glass pointing from Father Time's grounded palm into infinite possibility is no threat, but a wonderful boon—if the next thousand years is a virgin sheet of crisp onionskin—then let us write upon it without fear and, by all means, *let us bear down hard*.

But what to write? If we've pillaged or purchased from all the shops in all the malls, stuffing ourselves full of knowledge in all its known spheres and categories, *what next?* Armed with quantum computers which, like oracles at Delphi, will eventually answer virtually any question—

strengthened by nano-machines cruising our bloodstreams to repair this and boost that—

empowered by the new voices of our brainwaves being read by superconducting quantum interference devices so sensitive we can simply stare at our cars for the doors to unlock and open as if by telekinesis—

exploring with new senses virtual worlds as intricate and varied as each mind that henceforth will exist—

nearly immortalized by telomerase and biotech/engineering up the yin-yang—

afire with our mastery not merely of fusion but of processes so fundamental and vast that only the equations which describe our universe from quark to quasar could reveal them—

armored by new materials made possible by sophisticated control of single electrons as well as microgravity manufacturing sites in orbit—

What will be left?

ii.

"Recognize Godd = Art = I = Art = Godd = I. Time will stop. Time will go. Just watch."
—Raymond Soulard, Jr., "Millennial Artist's Survival Guide," 1998.

What do the Christians like to say of Death? It is but a Door. Whenever a door is shut somewhere, somewhere else one opens. With old avenues of knowledge shut down, when the games of art and science have all been played, new pavement will be laid as we stretch our wings, swim the Solar System, and finally go postal on the interstellar void.

Funny, but we've employed electricity and magnetism for quite awhile now, doing lots of interesting things with those two sides of that one force called electromagnetism. *Do we totally understand that force?* We don't.

As we begin to lighten things up with tricks played on space and time by gravity, we will certainly have a long way to go before we grasp all the implications of the things we'll be doing. The "cosmological constant" force of antigravity, or quantum energy, or quintessence, or whatever people end up calling it—where will *that* lead? The old games may be over, but the players are still around, and they'll just find new games to play.

The "blue marble" astronauts first saw from space in the last half of the century that is now ending the old millennium—that beloved blue speck will be both less important and more important than ever before. As we venture forth and make our presence felt in alien places which require us to stand in for Yahweh to bring our own life, to play both Godd and Johnny Appleseed, Earth will be

but one of many worlds where men and women live, work, dream and love. Yet Earth will remain first among all those worlds, pre-eminent, the crown jewel, deemed all the more precious as the place that birthed us, the source of all life, the sweetest of all celestial spheres.

iii.

"Something's about to happen. The anxious buzzing's passing from our dreams to our limbs."
—Raymond Soulard, Jr., "Millennial Artist's Survival Guide," 1998.

As new worlds, new sciences and, yes, new humans are born, old things will die. There is no birth without death. There is no birth without pain. Yeats' rough beast is bringing new good stuff—people are afraid, though, because for the new good stuff to get here, some of the old good stuff has got to go. And, as always, you never get good stuff without bad stuff. "Something's about to happen."

The transition won't be all that easy. This century, of which we are justifiably proud, also rocked the planet and our entire species with two World Wars, atomic fireballs, genocides, needless starvation and poverty and disease—woes on a scale never experienced before. That's all over now, because we are about to take on woes that will make us yearn for "the good old days."

Zeus, athwart Olympus, hurled thunderbolts in his fury when word of Prometheus's betrayals reached him, and he had his servants, Force and Violence, bind Prometheus to a mountain-crag where each day a vulture would tear out his divinely regenerated liver. The old order was gone, the status quo dissolved, the safety of known quantities flushed down the sink-hole, the quiet of humanity knowing its place evaporated and was gone forever.

One cannot give a small child matches, H-bombs, or the genetic code, and not expect the child to make mistakes. As humanity greedily grabs for its new powers and potentials, humanity in its haste will break a few heads. And that's how you make an omelette.

* * * * * *

Judih Haggai

daily arson
birds wake up to burnt
and sing morning hope

* * *

pretty songs
burning fields
morning salad

* * *

soft smell of burnt
rides on the cool breeze
yesterday's fires

* * *

homeward bike ride
within winds of the desert
seashore air

* * *

emptiness of mind
time to gaze at Jupiter
listen to distant booms

* * *

steps slow down
sounds of nature, sense of ground
slight breeze on skin

* * * * * *

Tom Sheehan

Jehrico's Tub

[Fiction]

From the top of the ravine wall, in a remote canyon of the Drago Mountains, Jehrico Taxico spotted an old wagon on the canyon floor, hundreds of feet below him. It was hidden from any lower view by a few trees and brush and a huge chunk of palisade wall that had fallen long ago like a dish on its edge. He judged that the wagon had not fallen from the high escarpment because it looked to be still in one piece. Probably its driver and occupants had sought safety by hiding in that place, he thought, only to get caught by whatever they were hiding from, or yielded at length to animals or nature getting as cruel as it could. No survivors lurked in the scene, or any horse or mule or ox that had hauled the wagon to this point. Only the long shafts for a single animal hitch appeared solid still sitting at an angle on the ground. A fallen rock had crushed one of the rear wheels. There were no other traces at all. And not a bone to be seen.

He could not tell how long it'd been there, but the wagon was now, without any doubt, his bounty, his possession. Perhaps, he thought, some good luck was coming his way. Lots of folks in Bola City looked on him with a bit of disdain, some of them calling him shiftless and worse, mostly because he would not kowtow to the demands of harsh bosses who treated him meanly simply because of his name. He would not work very long for such men. There were times he'd quit after mere hours because "I ain't putting my mule Mildred through that sort of treatment without getting her fair share of feed."

Even the part-time minister, butting into a morning church gathering, said, "Why, Jehrico's name is just a trade off with the Good Book, daring to match it up with a foreign name. That's near blasphemy from where I sit." He got up on his high and mighty horse and added, "A good lesson is not too good for him every now and then." Some people in Bola City looked differently at the good minister after he said that mouthful.

In that high morning of discovery, the skies bluer than ever, random clouds throwing shadows into the canyon on top of other shadows, Jehrico rode down off the edge of the plateau on a narrow ledge. At the back of his mind he cradled two thoughts, one that Mildred was as sure-footed as any animal he had ever known ("she had better be" came up a third thought on its own), and the other that the ancient people who had carved this path along the edge of the cliff must have spent whole lives working on it. He couldn't imagine how many of them might have fallen over the edge while doing their work, or coming and going. Their days, obviously, had to be long and arduous, and filled with immediate danger.

With those thoughts the ancient people took over his mind, which said, "Mildred hasn't let me down yet in our long journeys." Jehrico whacked her on the neck, knowing it was a love tap accepted by the mule. She made a funny noise for that acceptance. She had better accept, for the pair of them was a long-distance odor to anybody they met on the trail.

"J&M ain't goin' to surprise anybody," Collie Sizemore once said in Hagen's Saloon. "I smelt the pair of 'em long before they was near enough to hear." Collie, like Jehrico, was a fixture out and about Bola City. Where Jehrico's claim was sometimes in dispute, like some cowboys with bad smellers 'cause they were disturbing on their own account, Collie's distinctive claim was the reduction in identification of things, as if he wanted to be spared of too much speech. A shot and a beer became "an S&B" and Tally Rand, saloon owner and his woman Laverne, became simply T&L, and from that initial declaration he nevermore spoke of, to, or about them as singular entities, but as T&L, the one

and only T&L, the pair of them, the barsome twosome, the great salooners.

A stranger, in town even for a few days, would find his head spinning on his shoulders trying to divine what Collie was saying, for in one breath of conversation he might hear about J&M and T&L and S&B and J&R and Q&A and L&D, while the other listeners nodded, and M&M, which eventually meant Me and Mine, Collie and his family, out on the M&M spread south of town. *He has odd mouthfuls of the King's English*, as one patron of the saloon, passing through, was heard to utter as he climbed back on the stagecoach moving further west.

So, on this day of a major event coming to Bola City, there is M&M talking in his way out front of T&L's place of wetness and watering, and J&M going behind the huge rock slab once fallen endwise off the face of the canyon wall. The first thing Jehrico noted was that usual leather traces had disappeared. He believed them to be either taken away or eaten up by the laws of nature. "Look at that, Mildred, ain't a good piece of leather left."

He did not see any human skeletons or bones on the ground or in the wagon's front seat, and there were no weapons, no ammo of any kind, no tools. "They done got took away, Mildred, that's for sure." He saw no trunk remnants or any clothing usually carried by people moving west. Thieves of some order or other had executed their claims.

"Hey, Mildred, take a peek at that natty piece of canvas flopping atop somethin' large in the back of the wagon." Jehrico thought the little flutter of canvas to be from a breeze he had not felt. "Best not take no chances." He drew his rifle from the scabbard and held it steady as Mildred walked closer to the wagon. "It sure used to be green, Mildred, that canvas, but it's gone brown and black streaks now and hardly no patch of green at all." But it did not move again. When Jehrico pulled on it, it came apart in long thin pieces, the way frayed silk finds its end. He harrumphed and said, "Imagine what them bones is like right about now."

To his great surprise, he admitted later on down the line, "That old, torn canvas was coverin' an iron bathtub, a real iron one, with claw legs for its four feet like it could walk away on you if it had a mind to. Two people could fit in the dang thing at one time, it was so big. Ain't that a pretty picture for thinkin' about? I seen pictures of such tubs and knowed immediately that there ain't no other tub like it in all of Bola City, or in the whole of the territory. I never had me a bath in anythin' of the sort. The river, every once a blue moon, as old Crowley said, was good enough if a woman teetered herself on the bosom of the horizon, being as what hope is."

The cowpoke Crowley had spoken likewise for Jehrico, whether he knew it or not.

Jehrico Taxico, as slow in his thinking as Mildred his mule in obeying the strap, began to think how he could best utilize his newfound treasure: a sole, unique, one and only, bathtub for all of man, with appropriate dues paid for its use. He wondered aloud where in Bola City it could be best used. "Sure enough, Tally Rand would offer a goodly sum for its purchase, or Scales at the other end of the street. But I'm thinkin' real hard here that a separate place would be best, could get more users, make more money."

His mind wandered through all the citizens of Bola City who could backbone a new enterprise. At length, after close measurements and other judgments, Jehrico informed Mildred, "Molly Yarbrough at the livery's the one most promisin', and the most honorable. Though tough old Barnaby Fremont does all the heavy work and fronts the livery from dawn to dusk, it's Molly Yarbrough who holds the purse strings close to her bosom."

"But, Mildred," he added, as he looked at the tub again, "we got to get the damn thing to the livery." He set to work.

The shafts were apparently still in decent shape, and when he took them apart he pictured them closed on Mildred. With a half-day's work, he had the front wheels and axle free from the wagon and the shafts ready to mount. Not without a struggle, he managed to get the bathtub off the wagon and lowered down onto the axle. He had to balance it and tie it down, with the claw feet in the air and rope lashed around them.

As he and Mildred headed back toward Bola City, a squeak of humor hit Jehrico Taxico right where it's funniest. It felt good, almost as if his whole body regaled with the feeling, and he could see the good townsfolk of the place lined up all along the street and pointing at him, making the silly noises they sometimes do. "They can laugh all they want, Mildred, but we got the last laugh this time." He looked over his shoulder and the tub sat as even as it could be, balanced over the heart of the axle, the single line of rope as taut as it was at the beginning of their ride.

"When we decide we're ready to go to St. Louis, Mildred, with all the money we're gonna make, we'll be used to all the hullabaloo. Even old Collie's got to fathom somethin' new outta this, like JTM or JMT or TMJ or MTJ or however he'll have me and you and this here tub of ours. Yes, sir-ee, Mildred, we is now a triple measure of names and bound for St. Louis in a few years."

It was, in fact, Collie Sizemore who first spotted them coming into town and he rushed into Hagen's Saloon and yelled out, "T&L, you gotta come see what this is paradin' into town, if you want to believe it. It's J&M and somethin' I never seen before, all scrunched up on half a wagon and tied off like the damnedest windstorm's a comin' cross the Big Divide. Looks like a boat, it does, all tied up with rope and plunked down on wheels, and Mildred hustlin' along like she allus does. Just J&M and this thing I ain't got a name for."

Tally, in a second, knew what the trophy catch was that Jehrico Taxico was parading into town. People were coming fast along the street, making noise, exclaiming on high that a mystery was upon them, and Scales was in the lead.

"Jehrico," Tally said, "if that thing is yours by found, I'll buy it from you, fair and square. You name a goodly price and we can discuss it over a few pints a' beer."

Scales cut him off at the pass. "Forget him, Jehrico, I'll give you top dollar for it, and you get first and last wash of the day any day of the week you choose, and that's my given promise."

"You neither one spoke any money yet, not for real. I got lookin' in other places to do." Jehrico said, while letting Mildred drink from the water trough. The crowd was bigger, the word already spreading wide.

Most honorable Molly Yarbrough, by now standing front and center of the gathering, smiled at Tally first, and then at Scales, knowing which way their roads took them. She said, loud enough for everybody to hear, "Jehrico, I won't buy it from you, but I'll rent it, for out back of the livery where my two rooms are, and you get free use of it every day if you so choose. You get half of what comes in and washes off, trail dust and all, as what can fit it. We can be pards in a new business and I'm thinking now of a name to go with it."

She saw Tally and Scales trying to measure things. "Like a big sign that says Jehrico and Molly's Emporium of Cleansing," and she smiled as she saw Jehrico Taxico nod his approval and Collie Sizemore, his mouth set tight and his head tipped in thought, already going to work on a short-cut.

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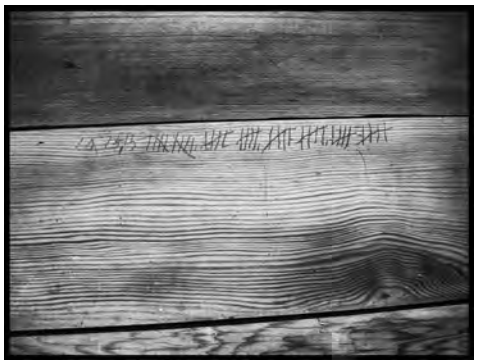
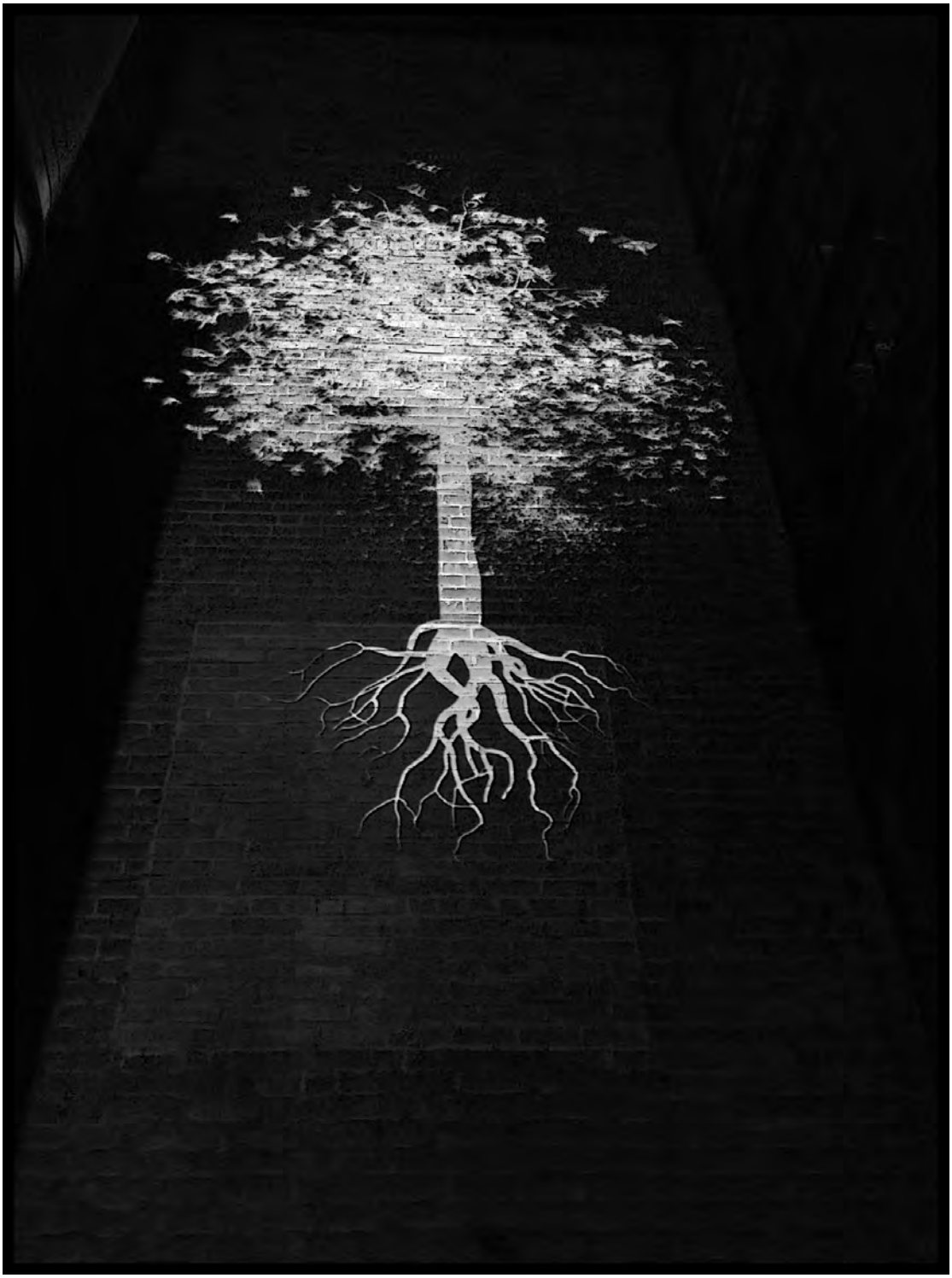




Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

Eleventh Series

"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."
—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

xxxvii. The Queen Wakes

When stolen from my father the King's
Palace in the Sun, I was child enough
to know nothing, & woman enough
to raise the notice of the strange man
who called himself the Architect, &
demanded me as trade for continued
peace with an Island Kingdom none
of us had known of before.

Presented at my father's court upon
his arrival, his eyes took me in with
one half glance but something else.
He sniffed me as we shook hands in
reception. A mere brief flare of old &
whiskered nostrils, but a light in his eyes,
a greedy approval. He knew I craved
my silken underthings close to my slim
frame, knew how I slowly touched secret
places when in bed & in bath. *Knew.*

We walked together, alone, in the
great gardens. The King my father
nodded my agreement. Did he think
this stranger would take me first &
approved on one of its grassy lawns?
I knew only to obey. I knew only
my own heated curiosity for another's
touch more dangerous than my own.

Nothing. Hardly conversation. More
 a series of instructions.
"You will be wed to my King."
"Wed?"
"You may bring servants of your own."
"Sir?"
Silence. I waited.

"You will learn to please him best
 you are able."
Silence.
"Expect little. Unless you can adopt
 the guise of someone lost to him."

We left without delay or ceremony.
My father the King, who had lost
 his Queen long ago, seemed to live
on since by habit, by duty, hugged
 me briefly. "Please him best you are
able. For those you remember here."

I was kept in a small cabin all
 the trip. Brought by night time
to a tall Castle, empty of faces
 to meet me.

A bedroom. Silky night-clothes. Sexier
 than any in my old bedroom.

I waited. Days, it felt like. Unseen
 hands left trays of food. I waited.

When this Island's King came,
 it was suddenly. A hard knock
& twas him & not my daily dinner.

His eyes upon me brief & thorough.
 Again, a sniff. *Is this what men are?*
Handsome, powerfully handsome.
 Me to be *his* Queen, satisfy
his bed?

Unsmiling, but not unfriendly, took
 my hand, & me in my night-clothes,
to his great Throne Room. The Architect
 waiting. The ceremony brief &
in a tongue I did not know. I was
 not asked to nod or agree. Given
no crown. The Architect silently took
 me back to my bedchamber.

Another passage of time. I waited.

Then a knock & not my new husband
or the Architect. Three old women
I'd hardly known from my home.
Sisters of the wild magick, a gift
from my father to my new ruler.

They spoke little I understood but
undressed me. Pressed, pinched,
cupped like a mathematic sought my
high young breasts. Fingered between
my legs, smacked my bottom. I'd
already been slaved; what more was
there to do with me?

Lights doused, me spread wide on
my bed, wondering if they'd
conjure a cock or more between
them to break my maidenhead.

Words, cackles, gnatterings.
Candle wax high & low.
Kneadings, pressings.
Sparks, tuneless songs somehow
erotic, rousing me everywhere.

Passed out, awaked, still dreaming,
led darkened corridors to a
much greater bedchamber. A big
man in a big bed. His eyes
sparkling with spell. Me delivered
nude to his grasp & us left
alone. *Was this real? Was I
finally ready to be claimed?*

Him mezmered, me doused deep
in a waking dream, he took me
slow & deep & hard & long, his grasp
aggressive & familiar, like he knew
me well, how to strum & stroke my
body for well-pleasing music,
like I knew well his demands &
pleasure.

My body's unpent furies moaning blind
with want of him any way he willed,
my fingernail happened to scratch
lightly down his hard cock roughing
between my thighs & his returning moan
was long, breathless, chasm.

One bare word: "Deirdre."

He rent me rough & wide.
Teeth. Tongue. Cum. Again.
I passed out caterwauling the name
with him.

Woke in my bed another self.
The crones now magick runts to
my will or returned to their starving
homes.

Yet only one command: "Make me Deirdre
in his bed."

It happened so rarely. Though I worshipped
the bites & bruises & cum & blood of
those nights.

Time passed & the jagged hunger
in my heart & body did not calm.
I took to wandering the White Woods
late at night, farther & farther
from the Castle. Sensed their magick,
beyond my grasp, beyond my rein.

Brought my runts out there on
full moon nights, frenzied their
fears that I would order them
drowned by my displeasure or
ground for evening meal.

"*Make him want me like her.*"

But a fooled heart does not want or love
the same. Loves from deepest despair
not deepest light. When a strange
pretty thing took his nose & cock
from me, I had nothing. The White
Woods where I yowled with my runts.

Till the night the King's son, little
 seen by me, snapped his silent
spyings on a twig, & the runts ordered
 to catch & release him to me.

Did not look like my King. Slender,
 pretty, a strange limp. Shy of me
but one. A small sniff.

The runts bound my hands around
 a tree trunk, gave the boy a
long spiked switch to complain
 on my tight back side. The runts
magicked up his reluctant young cock
 to what I commanded. The runts
heard my anguish split the night
 & cackled merrily.

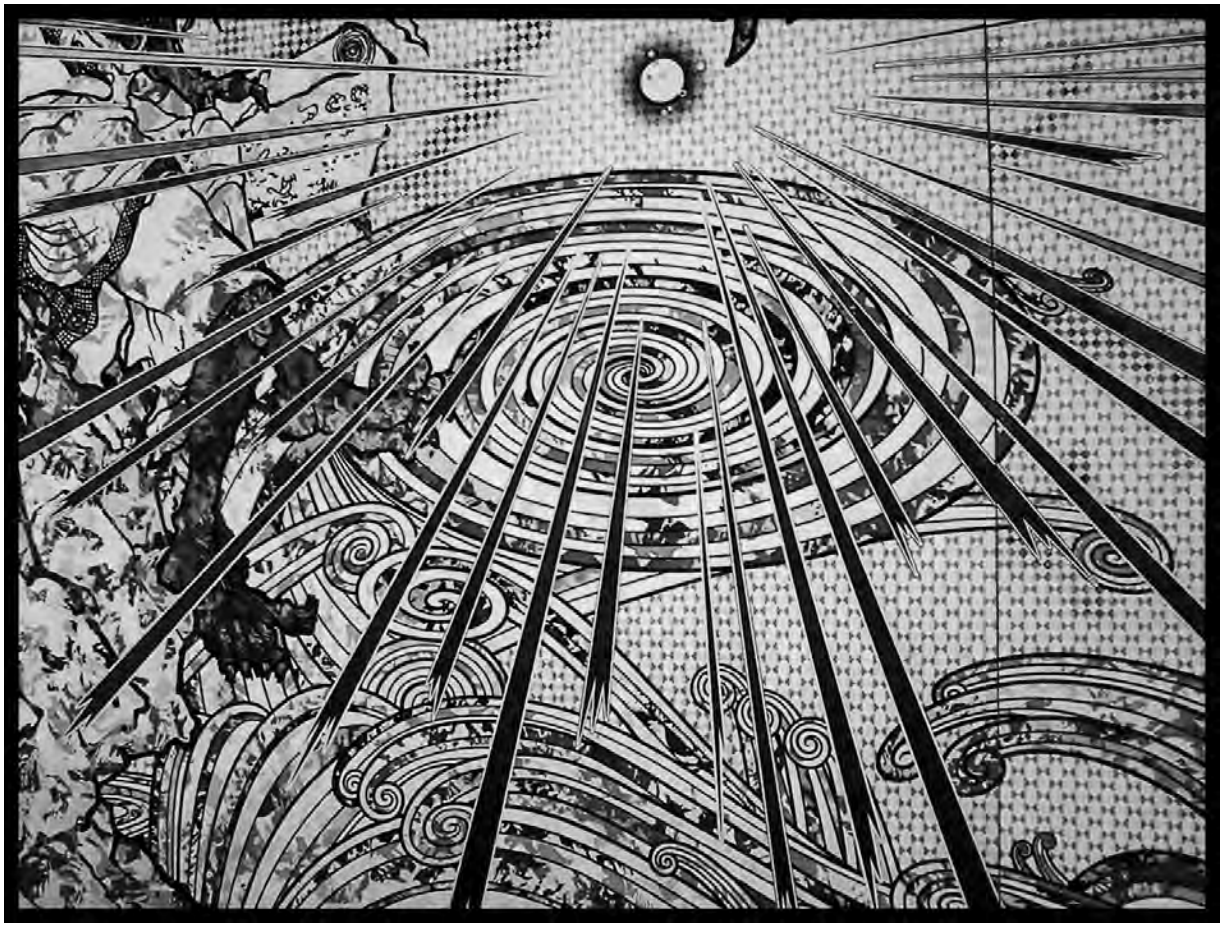
Did he love me, truly want me?
Why could I not cum anymore?
Why didn't I care when he left for
 the Mainland, for peace-making,
for games? *Why did I wish him well?*

It was then the runts finally did
 right by me, if only to preserve their
dying carcasses. They led me
 one night not to the White Woods,
where no young man awaited anymore.

They led me to the shore of the
 Wide Wide Sea, what I had not
seen since the night brought like
 a sack of coins. Told me wait &
were gone. The Sea before me
 roiled & sang, surf furied & foamed.

I heard terrified animal cries far
 down the shore. Approached to find
a dozen weeping cows chained, like
 a strange sacrifice? to a large
outcropping quite close to the
 water's edge.

Crying in fear & hunger for their starry fields,
 instead seeming lures for powers from the Sea,
victims of men's beliefs that blood's only choice
 is spending or spilling. Wild horror at
what galloped from the waves.



Enormous & strange & beautiful & wondrous.
I thought to watch him consume them in a few
great bites at most when instead he snapped
their links & roared them away. I watched
him, feeling something light & powerfully
gleaming running through my blood & bones,
feeling as he turned to me that I was
no longer faux Deirdre, nor would be again.

He approached me, huffing & snarling.
Reached deep in me, crumpled the mask
I had worn for two unloving Kings. Led me
far deeper in the White Woods than ever
my runts & I had gone. Lay with me as
more than man, the Beast men have
mucked over deep within, till a war or
an unresponsive woman bursts him
sloppily, blindly to the fore.

He showed me unfurled power that
night, sang for me scraps of the
first songs, drew me beat by beat,
breath by breath, from that shore,
from the Castle I prisoned, from my
long gone nights of secret silken
underthings & nought but my own soft touch.

Far from men's worship of the celestial
ferment above, what they mold to riddles
told to herd the many wide-eyed
with ignorance.

He sniffed. I sniffed. We laughed & sniffed
together. We twined & fused the lonelinesses
of our worlds together, him lighting my
every crevice with knowing, with a *hmmming*
that buzzed me awake & open & glad
wanting, loosened the long-time harness of men
around my heart, revealed the better stars
of the many worlds, their fenceless limits.

He taught me each time we met
of the forces in the many worlds
that no man controls. Tap, harness
to slave others awhile, but never control.

Mankind, a living thing, roots from
these forces, in its fist's desire to tame
& own, the plays & persecutions of its history
bide within these forces' grasp. Men
will study, ignore, reject their roots deep,
skinning these roots of their merest riddles,
& gnatterings & questions.

Him not quite a man, we contrived
a sex-box that would better bear our coupling,
& then a myth that something darkling
made in me.

I was no longer the unloved daughter of one King
or helpless bride of another. My boundaries
breached, my chains snapped, I could
only advise the King's blooming Princess
daughter to sniff when men neared
her, to hope that something
in her too would measure her links,
their tautness & strength, & find
her own aid in making for the fences.

* * * * * *

xxxviii. Maw

I am Beast. I am bird. I am buzz.
I am berry. I am Man. I am Beast.

There is a maw at the heart of the world,
& from it I emerged. I what sang
men & their prisons come this world.

I what they sniffed through the chasm
between worlds, what chose them come
hither, what fell them upon this earth.

Life seeks life, or its little flicker.
The light in things, where beat & breath
may come, blow, burst, bloom, *be.*

Before men, the salt upon the wind.
Before men, leafs softly crackling boulder.
Before men, what was before waiting's hope.

A million loose chemicals & unsparked
processes. Hungers resided without
knowing of sate, thirst of quench.

The Gate was built to sniff me out
 from countless inert worlds,
rouse me when I neither waked
 nor dreamed. Make me yearn,
call it music, give me time's
 coming & going, the blessing of *other*,
the curses of *then* & *hence.*

Men became *other* from me,
 warred weirdly over *then* & *hence.*
Explained now what had needed none.
Contrived shrines to their explainers
Warped the world to resemble their
 answers, throttled it like softened
  clay. I tried to understand. *I let.*

When first I bodied, it was very far
 from men. I kept close to trunk,
to root, to leaf. The glow, the *hmmm*.
 I was chewed as root & nut,
I was shat & pissed out. I was mud.
 I was stream. High, of cloud.
Heating lava. Floating cold berg.

Peaceful mornings, near my best-known
 white birches. Thinking about where
I've been, where I am now. I am nearing
 men, disquiet, trembling. Later, there
is feeding all around me, a sharper-
 tongued wind, the beautiful violence
of mating. I know now there is an edge
 to things, near, far, one, another.

I close my still-new eyes & I let
 more, let myself body up a man,
reach through men's time & space
 for one to dwell & know.

I become the nearly-blind man,
 my remaining sight still fluttering
with lilac & lily, moving my firm hand
 by their scented light, scratching up
a spark on a great canvas by glint
 & petal, my rendered silhouettes
shaped like a man's yearned God-thing.

Now open my eyes & I am the scrawny
 prick-hard singer, finding my music
beneath the night's sweeping skirts,
 insisting the oldest idols of men
totter forward & people my lyrics.
 Grind bloodless hips new with
the next hour's unspent seed, its high
 crackling juice.

Close again & now the tall professor,
 behold my sepia-washed pictures,
their hard press at your jaw & shoulders
 to trouble your own sanity's clay,
cackle & resist this years-long
 failing game of men.

Open again to fierce lights & now
 the dark man kneeling with
my horn & shredding time—but most
 men not like this, hacking at the edge
to things, looking for the maw at
 the heart of the world. Most relent
quickly & worry their few or fewer
 stones in the ever-crowded shades.

I retreat to my mornings &
 the white birches I know lessly
because I yearn them, I love them,
 & I cannot forget the furies of men,
how they loving ferment the world's destruction.

I am less bird. I am less buzz.
I am less berry. I am more Man.

What can I become but warning to
 this world, *my world*, of this rankle
come upon it? What can I do but move
 painfully among the herds of men
to find one here & there to warn,
 to point to the far edges, *there*
is where the power you seek,
 the beauty you yearn, the meaning
you hunger, lies!

Where you can freely taste the salt
 upon the wind! Where you can
reck the world's glow, its ever *hmmm!*
 Beyond *other*, *then*, & *hence!*

I find a distant faith that there are a
few who might seek me, might come
with me to the edge. I retreat
near fully within the Gate & tune
myself to its alien glow & *hmmm*.
I braid me with its paths of walled
roots & vines. I contain me nearly
all in a Cave that I now
let pulse with all I am. This Cave
becomes the maw at the heart
of the world. I wait, I glow,
I *hmmm.* No longer know who
will come or when.

I wait. I glow. I hmmm.

* * * * * *

xxxix. No Final Thing to Know

Did you emerge from me, or because
of me, or like me from the nearness
of men, the temptations & mysteries
of their bodies?

There wasn't you. Then there was you.
Once there was you, there never had
been a before, a *wasn't*. You'd always been.
We met, new, perpetually in that courtyard.

I made it be long after it no longer was.
You came again & again. We were man
& woman, we weren't. Like a heavy costume
we each wore. The wants & ways of
men & women would shape this world.
Body up as them, & know.

While new, before dancing, if there was,
we would tell our travels. You showed
me winter lights on a long boulevard,
a hidden shade of cool salmon over
low hills. I showed you battlefields,
on moonlit nights. Close to the dying.

The courtyard of many round black
metal tables, four young White Birches,
& full moonlight upon it & the many
ancient buildings nearby. Where men
debated how men could salvate men,
& the world rustled up for its materials
& survival tactics. The world a stage,
men the only important players.

Sometimes gone from each other,
far from courtyard & men,
trees so great, like it was their
world instead, or too, as trees think.

Moving bodies swathed in sweat & smoke
& drums, we both yearned & returned
to these nameless ancient times when
little was yet settled in the world.

We find each other, even these heres-less
heres & nows-less nows, & others
like whatever we are? Flesh & bone
not a sure thing, little separating one
from another. Yet I still chase you,
nearly cohere, wish to know. Your eyes
crackle with fear of want, not mine
but your own. You touch my beard as
though a pet. I tangle your hair with my fingers.

I bring you to their wars, in every
land, every century, every language,
every God-thing, fought by stone
& by knife & by rifle & by cannon &
by missile & by spaceship & electronic
mindfields. Always, *always*, a pile
of corpses. We lay still among them.
A sigh. I hush him as though a night bird,
the wind.

We still danced the courtyard but
you urged us to our travels more
often, a hungering canker in you to
visit their great gardens, their silent
cemeteries, how their garbage ever more
filled the land, the Sea, the skies
above. We danced but you thrashed
in my arms. More often you evaporated
back to the One Woods, deep lost
hours of forming, of formlessness.

You found less & less in their couplings,
their music, their tries at peace-
making among their own kind. You needed
to forget them as I needed to reck
them, harness them, find among them
I could teach.

The last time, the courtyard, our
dance, the battlefield, that boulevard.
Those trees, your last smile, & how
it lingered.

Whatever left of us that remains,
still together, tonight, still looking on,
still looking back. You are gone now,
save what throbs in my mind,
& *hmmms* in my heart. For life,
for love, for loss, there is no final thing to know.

* * * * * *

xl. An Edge to Things

Now we only walk the One Woods
together in my many dreams,
the bizarre mind toys I learn from men,
where their wishes & lusts & regrets
body up form in sleep, where they graze
the wider world, beyond their cradle
of knowing & feeling, & usually dismiss what
they cannot easily reck as unworthy to know.

My dreams, too, press my loss & regret but
more my chasm from what I was, how like
men I've become. Yet I know dreams not a
separate or lesser land, simply a strange
& far one. Travel it often, with purpose, &
its exotica becomes knowable, familiar.

Yet still *mind toys* because our bodies no
longer near, dance as we did, the magick
of dream's softer clay undone by waking
alone, again, in a dawn's sweat, hands
grasping my cave's close, empty air.

We walk the One Woods & now you speak
a strange tongue, its click-clicks &
noise-noises, the way red & blue & yellow
& green & orange & violet & sometimes
indigo would burst from the trunks &
bushes around us, these like notes
played by you in songs you made to be.

Always dusk, too, in these walks, when
light blurs & lingers, when but a
few stars peep out in the sky. No
full moon's raw alien power nor
dawn's thrust of day upon the land.

Then I wake again, the close empty
darkness. And you are far from me,
& I am silent again. Signs of your songs
as I mutter through these One Woods, spears
of your many colors struck into fallen
logs. I don't ask how but read them
as they melt, sigils none other see
or would know.

You believe their world must end,
that men will consume & destroy all,
feed on the world till *all* is maw.
You would escape, would somehow take
me too, & but one way this possible.

"A girl who is not a girl approaches.
She comes from the stars, & could
lead men away with her again."

You would sacrifice this girl to the maw
at the heart of the world. You would
sacrifice her to me. You would have me
compel her choice.

"We will transform what they would
destroy." Yet I wonder if she is
a different way. I wonder if nobody
has to die. I wonder *why I must choose*.
I find your many colored songs in more
& more clearings, yet dream of our walks
less & less often.

I stand now where we first met, deep
 in the Tangled Gate, but this is
neither waking nor dream. I am come
 from the shore, sharing the agonies
of a good woman who also cannot have
 what she yearns.

I stand here to call down the stars
 from the sky, & to find among them a truth
to hold & pursue. I gesture with my
 wild paws, grasp & swap out handfuls
of light, looking for the path I seek,
 crush & fold & block the heat of that
faraway worlds which sent men here,
 roar my relentless need with full throated
lungs. Reach finite paws from my finite
 torso futilely toward places & truths
ever far away from me. You, my love,
 ever far away from me, *you are*
the maw at the heart of me. I will
 let the girl choose. If it has to be,
I will yearn you ever, & let you go.

* * * * * *

xli. Our Game

The Tangled Gate neither waking nor
 dreaming, like old, my refuge from men
& loss & a world become too complex
 for me to know or protect. I still walk
on two legs most times but looser, less
 lonely distinct from the rest.

A retreat, yes, whatever I am less diffuse
 upon the world, but nothing lost yet,
no more than storms come & go, colors
 on the dusk, fallen leaves & bare fields
in winter. Time little passed, little really changed,
 & then one morning you came.

You first came in lilies & soft early light.
You first came in the mind toys men
 called dreams.
You came with time & change.

I sniffed you, twice, but did not know if
 to call you friend. You saw me &
you jerked a bit, sniffed me a little too.

And you smiled. And yet you were careful.
And yet I knew careful had not been
in your nature till you saw me.

A girl who was not quite a girl. Fallen
from the stars, drawn inexorably to me,
yet you look me unknowing, curiously,
like I was a kind of Hummingbird
or some untried fruit.

I turned away & retreated back along
the path I'd come, a pace neither
inviting nor flight. You followed, wonder
without guile, until I led us to
a break in the path, an open green field.

I sat on a half-buried log next to you,
& tried to look like a man, & tried to speak
like a man, but you shook your head *no,*
no bother, in this Gate there is truth.

We played a game that morning. Tap the air
& loose its notes, collect the notes &
shape a thing. Gently blow & lure its six
or seven colors. Nod, exchange.

We made fish that swam the air
& birds that soared the earth.
You showed me your Hummingbird &
its wings of buzzing stars, & I gave you
cackling sparkles of laughter. We pressed
for a third friend to join us, & something
emerged great-winged & green-scaled
shiny, paused a lingering breath & away.

Last round you conjured a small White
Bunny, pink nose, mesmering eyes, tranquil
but intent expression. I held her, felt her *hmmm.*

You shook your head when I made to clap
hands, give the Creature back to the air,
as was our usual play. Your smile bid me keep.

How were you come to me? From the stars
to dreams to this Gate. You woke back in
the world. *Should I follow?* We never spoke
aloud. *Should I discover the right words?*
Could you lead men away from war &
carnage on the green?

It seemed we met several times, could not
be planned or provoked. Our White Bunny
friend would join us, a twinkling for you,
a studying look over me.

Then less often, & you were less present,
like you were drawn away, even in your
dreams, the wants & cares of men more a
tangle around your heart than this Gate.

Then all I had of you was the White Bunny,
who would sniff twice & be gone for days.
Then only soft morning sunlight, trying
to remember where the field we'd met
& played our game. Where I did not need
to disguise my mind as a man's to please your company.

You did not return in dreams again &
I've shaped ever less like men. I've long not
played the air for games.

I wonder what you would find if you
happened on me now like our first morning.
I wonder if men would listen if you
chose to lead, held the chaos in their hearts
in your hands, bid them breathe, relax,
bid them let the green back in.

I wonder if she is right & there is no path
but away, for men or the world.
Will you ever return to the Gate,
will you smile & nod & bind this maw?

* * * * * *

xlii. The Carnival Room

The White Bunny returns to my White Birch,
sniffs twices, & settles in my lap, as though
I am a man, as though I am a rare &
trusted man. Her long ears rest on
my arms, as though I have arms.

We still together, we watch soft early light
unfold the day, like a springtime lily,
or the hands I now hold her with.
I am Beast, bird, buzz, berry, but
right now I am man, like unto one,
what she wishes.

I remember old. I remember new.
I am a fist of men at Sea, huddled over a map.
I am caught in nets, cages, the seeming
 wrong color of my skin, words on my tongue.
Shake my head to pull apart from these
 & become paintings hung in castles & hid in closets.
Shake again & I am a volcano burying all.
Again,& hunted for a laugh, mounted like a prize.
Shake, groan, *not everything, but too much.*

The White Bunny nudges me return,
 calms my spasms with her raised pink nose & mesmering eyes,
her deep *hmmm* through my shifting bones.
 I calm. We sleep. We dream together.

I am like a man & yet, always & yet.
 She's from my lap & now leading me,
hopping faster than any man's legs, & yet
 I follow apace. Holding a . . . white thread?
Through white birches brilliant in this
 soft early light, on & on, into places
dark & unfinished in the Tangled Gate.

I chase her through worlds, it seems,
 white thread steadying me, *hmmming*
me to this strange flow. Eventually slow
 to walking but no longer like a man's form.
A girl's slender carriage, wispy torso.

She is waiting me near a hole in the earth.
 Even though I am too large yet we crawl
through. A long long scrabble in the dark.
 My thread had given out yet I follow.
I am no more girl than man & yet
 an ease in this form, less half-panicked
light within.

We come to an ancient structure, burst
 through a half-fallen wall, stand within.
A girl's voice in my head says, "The Carnival
 Room is near."

Now remember old. Remember new.
You've come to me again in this strange
 mind toy, caused me follow the Creature
we made together so long ago? *Which*
 words to say after so long?

I am afraid. I am not afraid. *Which*
is truer? One room a chaos of reflections.
I see yours, the many shifts of mine,
others not of this world. The mirrors
shift & move past me in speeding patches,
seem to fling ancient scraps of song
at me to catch, a magickal food in
my starving jaws.

The White Bunny nudges me back to her
& hops quickly away, ears flashing,
& I follow on my girl's light legs,
through endless rooms of detritus & decay,
chasing worlds through, until as last
to a room where we stop.

She looks up at me, raises pink nose,
& again, & I enter deeper its seeming
murk. I hear cacophony, song. Then doors
mounted on walls, beckoning. Now a tunnel
into darkness aboard a longwheeled carriage.
Turn & see two yellow-skinned brothers
watching me, plucking stringless instruments,
barking songs of laughter.

Now at my feet a tiny creature, black & white,
gnattering at me in . . . click-clicks &
noise-noises? I am delighted.

But I wish to go. But the White Bunny is gone.
Yet a black thread in my hand, from her?

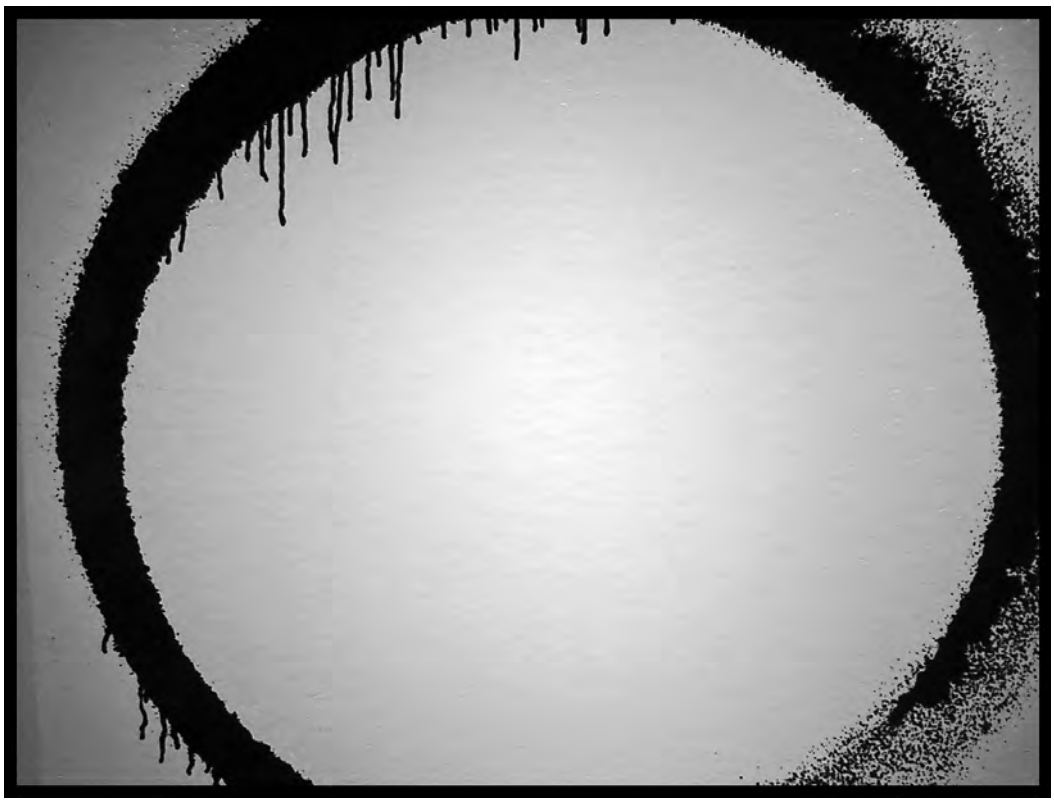
Leaving now as though being sucked
back to dry land, following the thread
& feeling the girl in me recede, feeling
now larger & more helpless, faster & faster
like falling horizontally, suddenly burst
choking & restless out of the earth.

The return is swift. There is no adventure
left. I follow the black thread back to
my White Birch, & rest with it in my hand,
alone. Now awake & no thread in my hand,
black or white. No White Bunny.

I am Beast. I am bird. I am buzz.
I am berry. I am Man. I am Beast.
Something would have me forget none
 of these, strain my bonds to remember
better old, remember better new.

Something would have me save what
 those around me would destroy.

* * * * * *



Tamara Miles

Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

Someone to Watch Over Me (Big Daddy Takes the Wheel)

Franklin Delano Miles I, my former father-in-law, is known as Big Daddy. He was like a father to me when I was married to his son, Del. We had only one run-in over the ten years I knew him well, and it concerned my daughter. Jillian was about two or three at the time, and we were at Frank and his wife Barbara's house, having a meal with them and a few other family members.

Jillian did something to annoy Frank, and he spoke to her sharply in a way that made me uncomfortable. Then, when Barbara gently protested, he responded with a remark that only made matters worse. At the table, we all grew silent, and then I pushed back my chair, went to pick up my daughter, and walked outside. The day was ruined. We left shortly after.

I later found out that when everybody was out of the house, Barbara made it clear to Frank that he would not be overbearing to a grandchild of hers again, and make her feel unwelcome in her house, and if he couldn't abide by that rule, he could get out.

This is a couple who have been married since she was fifteen and he was eighteen, with the exception of a brief divorce when they were still young. It was his fault, and he realized after about six months that he couldn't live without her and the children. Barbara has always taken care of him exceedingly well, to the point that she jokes, "If I am ever reincarnated, I want to come back as Frank Miles." So, I think for her to be willing to separate from him over the treatment of their granddaughter stunned him.

I laid low for the next few weeks, and then he called me and asked if we could go to lunch. He sat across from me in the restaurant and said, "Barbara thinks you're staying away from the house because of me. I want to tell you something. I will never say another word, not a word of correction to your child because, Tamara, if you want to break my heart"—and here, his eyes welled up—"you only have to keep that grandbaby from me."

We never had another problem. I loved Big Daddy, and I never wanted to break his heart. He wrote me a letter when I turned thirty, a beautiful loving gesture for a woman. He bought me pearl earrings. He and Barbara sent me to New York City with a drama group—my only trip there—so I could go to ten major art museums and five Broadway plays including *A Doll's House*. And it was he who found my father.

I didn't ask him to look for Dad. I didn't have to. One time his daughter Robin said to me, "I can't imagine you being out there in the world alone, without a Big Daddy." I think he felt the same. He owns a car dealership, as do several of his brothers, one of whom has a huge place in the Atlanta area. Frank knew that my father had been a painter in Georgia, so he called his brother John, who gave him a few suggestions, and then he started calling paint stores. When he got to Sherwin Williams in Marietta, the manager knew Dad and, from there, he eventually got an address for an apartment, and he put me in the car and drove me there.

I can't tell you what I was feeling when I walked up to that door and knocked. When a white-haired woman opened the door, I said, "Mrs. Shelton?" and she said, "No." The response threw me off.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "I'm looking for Tom Shelton. I'm his daughter."

She looked startled, and then she smiled and said, "Oh! Yes, yes. I'm his wife, Esther." I guess

she thought at first I might have been a bill collector or someone from the IRS. Dad owed about $30,000 to those folks, I would later find out. Anyway, she said he would be home in a couple of hours if I wanted to come back. I did.

My father stood at the door, and we fumbled over our words. Then he pulled out his wallet and showed me that, inside it, he had always kept a wrinkled photograph of me at seven years old.

Back in the car, Frank watched over me and waited.

* * *

Crawling

In this section, I'm going to let Dad talk.

I met Irene in '75, through her sister. I was sitting in a bar talking to a blond woman, and she said, "Would you like to meet my sister?" and I said, "Sure." I was 33, and Irene was 46, and didn't look it, had legs like a 16-year old girl. I went crazy. She'd already had four kids, five actually—one died at birth—and did not have one stretch mark or varicose vein on her legs. She worked three jobs—and to party like she partied, I couldn't understand.

She was a cleaner in a pants factory at night, then she would go work at a store called Leon's, stocking until about 1 a.m., go home from there and get maybe three hours of sleep, and then back to the laundry. When she wanted to party, she didn't go to work at Leon's, and she would have a few hours to party. I worked for a fellow named James. He drank and smoke, and it was killing him, and he knew it. We painted houses all over the Atlanta area.

Irene and I got "married" and "divorced"—there was no divorce, actually, since we weren't really married (Dad was still legally married to Mom until about 1978.) *When we got married the first time, we got married at J.W.'s house, her uncle. The second time, we went to Walhalla, South Carolina.*

We lived in a house way out in the country one time, but we bumped around from place to place, trailer to house, to apartment, etc. Her son Grady lived there, in the country house—and her daughter, Carolyn, who was about 15. I already had to go get shots in my knees, still drinking, taking diabetic medicine, arthritis medicine that didn't do me any good.

She said she was going to the American Legion, "You going?" she asked me. "Don't you just know I can't go. I can hardly walk," I said. "Well, I'm going," she said. I went, and things happened, and I tried doing a couple of dances and couldn't do it, so she started dancing with other people. We finally went home, and I couldn't even walk. I was crawling. She wouldn't help me out of the car. I had little steps to climb up. I crawled to the steps. She wouldn't help me up the steps.

We went to a bar down in Atlanta, dancing, one time. I went out to get something out of the car, and when I came back, Irene had about five guys around her, and I threw a bit of a fuss. I threw some chairs, I think. I said, "Let's go home," and she said, "I'm not ready to go home." She was walking out of the bar with the five guys, and I got into a fight with them. I got my ass whipped, but we went home together.

She changed when she got older, and sick, but back then it was terrible. I wouldn't treat a dog the way she treated me. When we split up the second time, I went back to Marietta and started living in hotels. Then about 1985, I met Esther. Irene had already married again. She had married a guy in 1980, so we must have split in '79, '78. We didn't correspond. I called her one time, and she told me she was married, so I said OK.

When I met Esther, she was 71, but she didn't look it. I was 46. We were married for the nine years, and she died at 80. She turned 80 Oct. 13th, 1995, and passed away just after that, so I was with her from 1986 to 1995. She didn't like bars much, although she drank a little. I met her at her girlfriend's house in Dallas, Georgia. We wasn't dating long when she moved in with me at the Lamar Motel, then we went to live at her girlfriend's house in Dallas. Then we just decided to get married, and went to Ringgold, Georgia. No blood test, no nothing, just go see the Justice of the Peace and get married. We lived with her sister, but not

for long, and then we put in for the apartment.

We lived in an upstairs apartment with one bedroom, stayed there about two years, then we moved over to where you remember going when you found me, and lived over there in the townhouse until she passed away. I was working for Randy Corley. James passed away in about 1981, alcoholic, died on his bed counting his money. I wasn't working for him at the time. Some of his workers found him. He didn't believe in banks. He just hid his money, but these guys, they wasn't crooks, they didn't steal his money, but they took out what he owed them. They called the law then.

Anyway, you might say I killed Esther because I decided I wanted a fish tank. I started out with one little one. My stupidity. I had no sense about getting more. I ended up having ten at one time. That's what killed her. I had a part in that, in a roundabout way because even in the summer-time, winter-time, and all, she helped me clean the tanks outside, on the patio, and I think that's where eventually she got her pneumonia. But I did quit drinking, in 1990, and I'm glad because it was right before you came and knocked on my door."

* * *

A Long Ways on the Bus

Dad tells a story of the Sabbath day with Alma.

"Alma used to take me to church because my Dad worked Sundays. She rode the bus with me, just every once in a while. Once I got to know the route, I rode by myself. She was probably just showing me the way. I don't think she liked church much. Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian. It was a little out from town, a long ways on the bus.

"It was about halfway from where I lived to where my cousin Jack lived. His whole family went to church every Sunday. Alma would wait for me at the end of the service, by the water fountain. Sometimes she cooked in the morning, and after church we had a nice meal, salad, meat, vegetables. She was a good cook. Sometimes we went over to Jack's house, just me and her, because we had to wait for Dad to get off work. He would come over there and get us."

Dad has a cigarette cabinet of Clinton's—probably made by the old man himself. Dad's proud of it, and it is lovely. Clinton smoked Raleigh cigarettes.

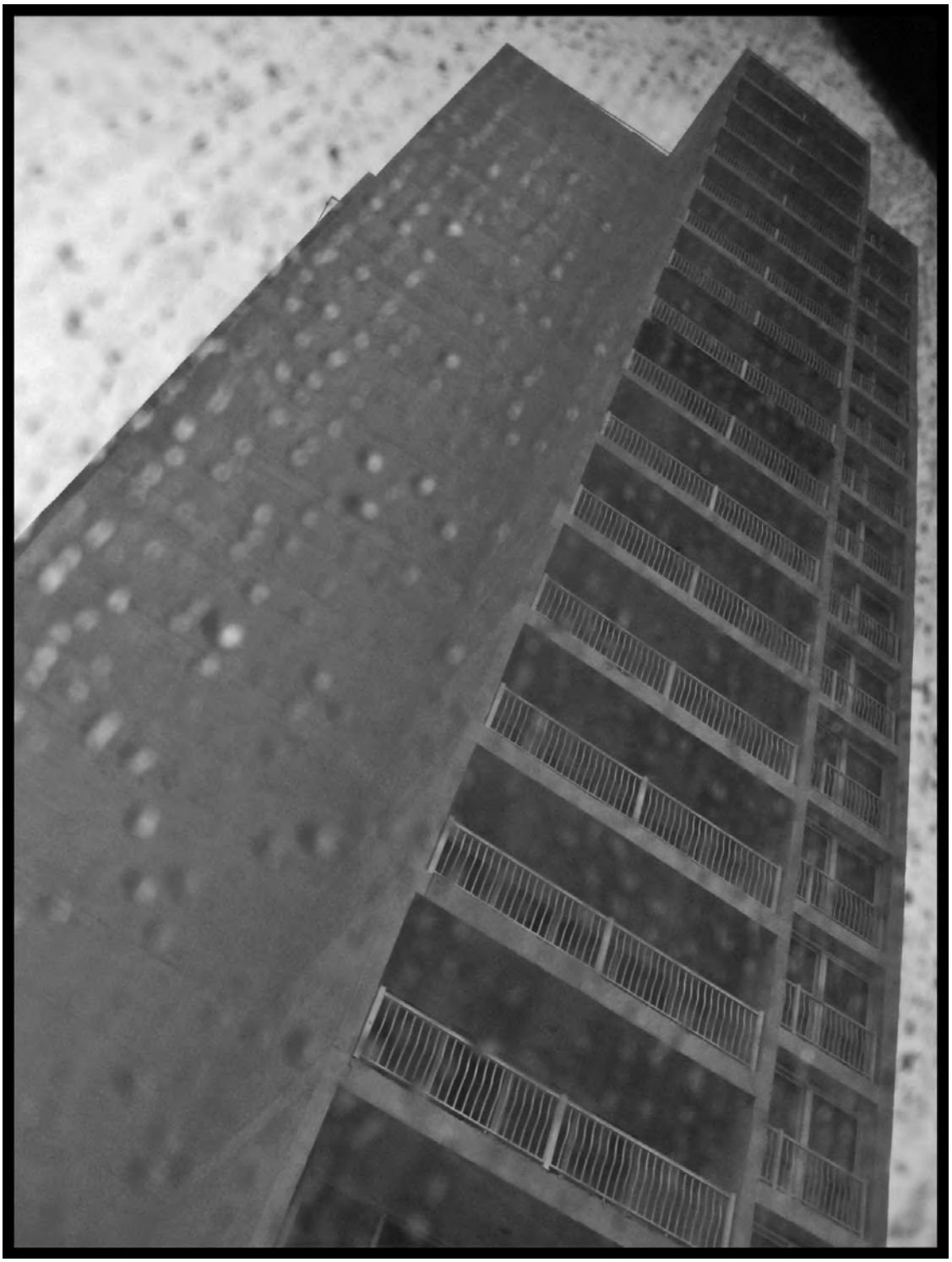
"He saved the wrappers because you could go to Montgomery Ward, and if you had a whole bunch of them, they amounted up in points, and he bought a lot of things, especially fishing stuff. He liked to fish. We went fishing together at a lake or two. 5227 East 8th Street, Kansas City, Missouri. The cabinet is lined with copper because it kept the cigarettes fresh. I want to say Alma smoked, but not like he did. He liked to drink whiskey. You can see where he laid his cigarettes burning on the top; there are little burn marks."

At one time, Dad had a leather briefcase of Clinton's but it was left in Alpharetta, Georgia, at the trailer he shared with Irene, and when I tricked him and got him over here in South Carolina for good, and then Irene went into the nursing home, he never got it back. I really hate that. Supposedly, it's at Irene's daughter Carolyn's house, but she says she can't find it.

Clinton was talented, smart, and good-looking. I don't think he graduated from high school. He lived in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, the same city where, as a boy of 12, J. Paul Getty had a paper route. This was about 1904. Clinton was born in 1908. I wonder if they ever crossed paths.

Getty became one of the wealthiest men in American history, but he couldn't make a marriage work, divorcing five times, each one lasting two to four years except for the fifth, which made it almost twenty years. His last wife, Lucile, left him because he resented the money she spent on medical treatments for their son's brain tumor, and related complications, and because when the boy died, at 12, Getty did not attend the funeral.

Getty's father had shaken his head in disapproval over all of these marital failures, and he



believed his son would be a business disaster as well, so he only gave him a meager cut of his expected inheritance before he died. Getty proved him wrong about the business, but not until he had made a risky investment in Saudi land and couldn't find oil for about four years.

Oh, but then he did, and it made him rich beyond his father's dreams. Did I mention that he wasn't always Johnny on the Spot with his own children or grandchildren? When his grandson, who bore his name, was kidnapped, he refused to pay the ransom until the boy's ear had been chopped off, and until he was able to negotiate the ransom down to the amount that was tax deductible. Well, actually, that plus the money he loaned his son (the boy's father), with interest due.

To be fair, Getty observed that his initial hesitation to pay came out of his concern for his other grandchildren and out of his belief that paying off a terrorist only supports further terrorism. Tell that to the boy who lost his ear and whose thank you phone call to his grandfather was refused. John Paul Getty III never fully recovered from the trauma of the whole ordeal and died five years ago when he was 54.

In the film *Smoke Signals,* (nothing to do with Getty, but bear with me), the brooding main character, Victor, has to go pick up his father's ashes after many years of estrangement. One of the songs featured is Ulali's "Forgive Our Fathers Suite":

Maybe in a dream
do we forgive our fathers
for leaving us too soon or forever
when we were little?
Maybe for scaring us with unexpected rage
or making us nervous
because there never seemed to be any rage there at all?
Do we forgive our fathers for marrying or not marrying our mothers?
For divorcing or not divorcing our mothers?
And shall we forgive them for their excesses of warmth or coldness?
Shall we forgive them for pushing or leaning
for shutting doors?

* * *

The Ghosts That Follow

I don't live in these rooms,
I just rattle around
I'm just a ghost in this house,
I'm shadow upon these walls,
As quietly as a mouse,
I haunt these halls,
I'm just a whisper of smoke,
I'm all that's left of two hearts on fire,
That once burned out of control,
You took my body and soul,
I'm just a ghost in this house
—Sung by Alison Krauss

Dad and I have had ghosts in our hearts.

It's impossible for me to know for sure the effects of being separated from one's mother and

adopted at three months, but common sense says there must be a sense of loss. In her controversial book, *The Primal Wound,* Nancy Verrier claims that children adopted in infancy forever carry the awareness that they were given up, which creates complex psychological needs that affect their sense of self and their relationships.

Verrier writes: "Bonding brings a component of safety and security, which I don't think adopted children feel. Once you've separated from one mother, there's always the possibility of being separated from another. They live with that every day."

On the other hand, Dr. David Brodzinsky has suggested that while adopted children do search for "identity, meaning, and connection" throughout their lifetimes, they are not at any greater risk for psychological problems than others.

Author Betty Jean Lifton, an adoption reform advocate (and an adoptee) called for open adoption instead of the secrecy that closed adoptions can create, the confusion and insecurity. She described the feeling common to adoptees that they are haunted by ghosts of the birth parent(s), and by the different selves they might have been had they remained in their birth families. But this is not all. They are also aware that they are not the biological children their adoptive parents might have had.

Attachment theory in psychology indicates that there are a variety of ways children may interpret their sense of belonging to essential others. They may experience attachment distress or disorders when that sense of belonging experiences a dramatic shift. Drs. Jeanne Segal and Jaelline Jaffe note that: "Individuals who experience confusing, frightening, or broken emotional communications during their infancy often grow into adults who have difficulty understanding their own emotions and the feelings of others."

Attachment distress may be exhibited through avoidance, ambivalence, disorganization, or reaction. These characteristics depend on the type of attachment challenges the child experienced. For example, whether a parent was absent, unavailable, rejecting, inconsistent, intrusive, frightening, or traumatizing.

Looking at my father, who lost two mothers, including one who had "chosen" him and then left him behind for another love, and at myself, who had a troubled, selfish, alcoholic, and sometimes abusive father who then went missing, a father whom my mother had left—well, we are a mix of different kinds of attachment distress.

Reading about attachment theory, I have recognized in both my father and myself some of the behaviors commonly exhibited by children with attachment distress even in their adult lives. Becoming more aware of these behaviors and understanding them better is both helpful and painful. I'm hardly surprised that psychological and emotional problems exist for me and for Dad. He has chronic anxiety, and I have Bipolar II disorder, a milder form of the illness that is known for extreme mood swings. In Bipolar II, the person often experiences a far greater problem with depression than with mania, and that is true for me. How much of our problems are genetic, and how much are environmental, is arguable.

In addition to anxiety, Dad has trouble with boundaries, his own and others'. In my perception, his other troubled behaviors include self-centeredness, blaming, suspicion, neediness, clinging, and helplessness.

As for my own, I can immediately think of statements made by my mother and by a former mother-in-law as attempts to characterize them. Mama described me as having a personality that says, "Come here, and leave me alone." This characterization fits in with ambivalent and disorganized attachment distress, a desire for security accompanied by lack of trust which leads to the conflict my mother described. I want a loved one close, within reach, and may experience intense emotional responses to perceived abandonment, but I do not like to be held too closely, and I want to be able to withdraw into myself as needed.

Barbara, my former mother-in-law, once said, "When you've been away, for a few days or a week, and you come back, I always have to start over to be close to you again. You hold yourself apart, hold back. No matter how close we were the last time we were together, how we laughed, talked,

and hugged, you seem to forget, and I have to draw you to me." She said this with much love and tenderness. I knew it was true but had no idea how to change it.

Her son once made a similar observation, even before our marriage was coming to an end. He said with a smile, a half-joke, "Honey, I could love you, if you just wouldn't fight me."

* * * * * *

Nexus

The day the corpse flower began to bloom
in Tucson, a caravan of African elephants at Amboseli
went on nighttime safari. Deep in the dark, a two hundred
pound calf came calling from his mother's thighs,

a boy hairy, short-trunked, ears
like small continents, pachydermos,
milk-teeth tusks in a diamond pattern,

lustrous. A herd of low grumbles made a late melody.
At dawn, the grazer-browsers looked for breakfast in the bush,
Mt. Kilimanjaro at their backs, dry lakes looming. Their trunks
teased leaves toward their mouths,

and all the while, back at the zoo in Arizona,
the corpse flower unrolled itself slowly, slowly, for hours,
red blossom opening before onlookers, cameras clutched,
and I, remote viewer, watched the birth live online.

Where, the nexus? between the now that flowers,
and the land of elephants in my mind, waiting for the day's first taste,
held in the fibrous tunic of my own mammalian eye,

fastened on an elephant carcass, bones baked by midday sun?

* * *

Underwater Politics

At the center of the cephalopod,
a night-strobe bulb, florescent, gleams
under a thinly glowing globe—

below, its tentacles, strips
of flexible lightning, go streaming out
like synthesizers,

and we are struck with wonder
at the sea, planeted as it is with splendiferous
creatures: cnidarian stars, ctenophores
lassoing their small-mooned prey,

soft-bodied sea anemone, upended
in cylindrical silence, inviting passersby
to a séance prefaced by venomous tea
and clownfished appetizers.

Though secretly we shudder
at predation, at the way even a gentle
touch creates the doomed paralysis
for those swept in by fate or daring,

we are not so myopic that we fail
to witness while we wait—
(staring, struck dumb with admiration for
the solitary glories of this space,

the corners of our mouths turned slightly
up) like crouched and muted
sympathizers.

* * * * * *

Many Blooms:
A Sampler of Modern Women Poets

Adrienne Rich

Diving Into the Wreck

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it's a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
and I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

* * * * * *

Wislawa Szymborska

Cat in an Empty Apartment

Die—you can't do that to a cat.
Since what can a cat do
in an empty apartment?
Climb the walls?
Rub up against the furniture?
Nothing seems different here,
but nothing is the same.
Nothing has been moved,
but there's more space.
And at nighttime no lamps are lit.

Footsteps on the staircase,
but they're new ones.
The hand that puts fish on the saucer
has changed, too.

Something doesn't start
at its usual time.
Something doesn't happen
as it should.
Someone was always, always here,
then suddenly disappeared
and stubbornly stays disappeared.

Every closet has been examined.
Every shelf has been explored.
Excavations under the carpet turned up nothing.
A commandment was even broken,
papers scattered everywhere.
What remains to be done.
Just sleep and wait.

Just wait till he turns up,
just let him show his face.
Will he ever get a lesson
on what not to do to a cat.
Sidle toward him
as if unwilling
and ever so slow
on visibly offended paws,
and no leaps or squeals at least to start.

* * * * * *

Jorie Graham

The Way Things Work

is by admitting
or opening away.
This is the simplest form
of current: Blue
moving through blue;
blue through purple;
the objects of desire
opening upon themselves
without us; the objects of faith.
The way things work
is by solution,
resistance lessened or
increased and taken
advantage of.
The way things work
is that we finally believe
they are there,
common and able
o illustrate themselves.
Wheel, kinetic flow,
rising and falling water,
ingots, levers and keys,
I believe in you,
cylinder lock, pully,
lifting tackle and
crane lift your small head—
I believe in you—
your head is the horizon to
my hand. I believe
forever in the hooks.
The way things work
is that eventually
something catches.

* * * * * *

Elizabeth Bishop

In the Waiting Room

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with Aunt Consuelo
to keep her dentist's appointment
and sat and waited for her
in the dentist's waiting room.
It was winter. It got dark
early. The waiting room
was full of grown-up people,
arctics and overcoats,
lamps and magazines.
My aunt was inside
what seemed like a long time
and while I waited and read
the *National Geographic*
(I could read) and carefully
studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire.
Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
laced boots, and pith helmets.
A dead man slung on a pole
"Long Pig," the caption said.
Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire
like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it right straight through.
I was too shy to stop.
And then I looked at the cover:

the yellow margins, the date.
Suddenly, from inside,
came an *oh!* of pain
—Aunt Consuelo's voice—
not very loud or long.
I wasn't at all surprised;
even then I knew she was
a foolish, timid woman.
I might have been embarrassed,
but wasn't. What took me
completely by surprise
was that it was *me*:
my voice, in my mouth.
Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I—we—were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the National Geographic,
February, 1918.

I said to myself: three days
and you'll be seven years old.
I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world.
into cold, blue-black space.
But I felt: you are an I,
you are an *Elizabeth*,
you are one of *them*.
Why should you be one, too?
I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.
I gave a sidelong glance
—I couldn't look any higher—
at shadowy gray knees,
trousers and skirts and boots
and different pairs of hands
lying under the lamps.
I knew that nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen.

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even
the *National Geographic*
and those awful hanging breasts
held us all together
or made us all just one?
How I didn't know any
word for it how "unlikely". . .
How had I come to be here,
like them, and overhear
a cry of pain that could have
got loud and worse but hadn't?

The waiting room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another.

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.

* * * * * *

Marianne Moore

In the Public Garden

Boston has a festival—
compositely for all—
and nearby, cupolas of learning
(crimson, blue, and gold) that
have made education individual.

My first—an exceptional,
an almost scriptural—
taxi driver to Cambridge from Back Bay
said, as we went along, "They
make some fine young men at Harvard." I recall

the summer when Faneuil Hall
had its weathervane with gold ball
and grasshopper, gilded again by
a –leafer and –jack
till it glittered. Spring can be a miracle

there—a more than usual
bouquet of what is vernal—
"pear blossoms whiter than the clouds," pin-
oak leaves that barely show
when other trees are making shade, besides small

fairy iris suitable
for Dulcinea del
Toboso; O yes, and snowdrops
in the snow, that smell like
violets. Despite secular bustle,

let me enter King's Chapel
to hear them sing: "My work be praise while
others go and come. No more a stranger
or a guest but like a child
at home." A chapel or a festival

means giving what is mutual,
even if irrational:
black sturgeon eggs—a camel
from Hamadan, Iran;
a jewel, or, what is more unusual,

silence—after a word-waterfall of the banal—
as unattainable
as freedom. And what is freedom for?
For "self-discipline," as our
hardest-working citizen has said—a school;

it is for "freedom to toil"
with a feel for the tool.
Those in the trans-shipment camp must have
a skill. With hope of freedom hanging
by a thread—some gather medicinal

herbs which they can sell.
Ineligible if they ail.
Well?

There are those who will talk for an hour
without telling you why they have
come. And I? This is no madrigal—
no medieval gradual—
It is a grateful tale—
without that radiance which poets
are supposed to have—
unofficial, unprofessional. But still one need not fail

to wish poetry well
where intellect is habitual—
glad that the Muses have a home and swans—
that legend can be factual;
happy that Art, admired in general,
is always actually personal.

* * * * * *

Margaret Atwood

Song of the Worms

We have been underground too long,
we have done our work,
we are many and one,
we remember when we were human

We have lived among roots and stones,
we have sung but no one has listened,
we come into the open air
at night only to love

which disgusts the soles of boots,
their leather strict religion.

We know what a boot looks like
when seen from underneath,
we know the philosophy of boots,
their metaphysic of kicks and ladders.
We are afraid of boots
but contemptuous of the foot that needs them.

Soon we will invade like weeds,
everywhere but slowly;
the captive plants will rebel
with us, fences will topple,
brick walls ripple and fall,

there will be no more boots.
Meanwhile we eat dirt
and sleep; we are waiting
under your feet.
When we say Attack
you will hear nothing
at first.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as* Notes from the Northwest, *& appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

6 / 30 / 1974 / 2018

I was asleep. Dreaming. Right?

The typewriter before me is a Smith-Corona, clacking brightly, as they do, as I type this now, coherent enough to type.

We can go out driving on Slow Hand Row
We could stay inside and play games, I don't know
And you could have a change of heart

—goes the old/*new*? hit on my white-faced pink cat transistor radio. The man says it's rising up the charts!

You, typewriter, were just . . . a bit ago . . . my beautiful MacBook Pro, Eurydice. No offense.

I'd had this dream, you see. It was 1974. I was at a Paul Simon concert. I'd come back here from 2018. All the girls wore fringed bell-bottom blue jeans. Simon was young again, not like when I'd seen him in the future, then a genius wizard grandpa minstrel going on his final concert tour. Big stage. Many musicians.

He's dark-haired again, on a much smaller stage, dancing cool then / now, & now / then.

She's got electric boots
A mohair suit
You know I read it in a magazine

continues the radio. "We don't stop till we reach the top!" cries the man.

I'm here now. *What do I do while here?* Walk around? Sure, I did that too, after that show. Found myself in a pretty small town for such a big star to be playing.

Nights were shorter back in 1974. So it seems. I walk down Main Street. Gas station selling 50¢ a gallon gasoline. That stationary store with brand-new pocket calculators & shiny word processors in the window.

Yah. Um. I walk on, looking in store windows. The sports trading cards store has a big poster of Hank Aaron hitting career home run number 715 to break Babe Ruth's record. Less than two months ago?

The news-stand headlines. "Nixon & Brezhnev Seek Test Ban Common Ground at Moscow Summit." "Watergate Hearings Heat Up DC." "Patty Hearst Still on the Run in California." "Russian Ballet Star Baryshnikov Defects in Canada." "Midwest Tornadoes Kill Dozens."

Nada Theater movie marquee:
Now Playing: The Parallax View
Coming Soon: The Planet of the Apes

So here I am, walking along, no dark shades or cool Afro or sexy fringed bell-bottom jeans to my name. I'm carrying along my Smith-Corona typewriter in its handled black case. No funky new word processor. No Eurydice!

"Rooms to Let." Sign hanging on store whose ground floor space's window is painted black. Just a scrap of a newspaper taped on its center: "MLK's Mother Among Those Slain in Atlanta Church."

I find the landlord in his room on the second floor. His door is open, & he's sitting in an old brown recliner popping cans of Schlitz in front of his black & white Apex TV with its Antennar 2000. Pop tops all over the floor.

We sit together, he insists. *Good Times* on the TV. I loved that show back when I was in 1974 my first time through.

Puts on his radio, turns down his TV's volume.

A soul group on the radio singing:
Money, money, money . . . Money!

"He ain't no Stevie Wonda'!" he says, slouched deep in his t-shirt & boxers. Offers me a beer. I shake it off.

"You want a room?"
I nod. "I'm from the future. I might be dreaming."
"Yah? What's it like?"
"What? The future?"
"Yah. We all got space cars & live to be a thousand?"
"Not that far. 2018."
"No shit!" his eyes bug.
"No."
"No more wars. At least a better president."
"A couple along the way. A couple worse than Nixon. I left the worst one yet."
"He's doing worse than Watergate & Vietnam?"
I nod. "Country elected a black man president. A good man. This new one's the punishment."

"A black man as president?" he laughs.
Sees I don't. Thinks it over. Looks middle-aged, or just drinker-old. But now he pulls from somewhere a big old bong, a classic, all breasts & cocks & hands & smiles. Loads it up. "Black hash. Only a little left. You're a guest though."
We smoke. Relax. He studies me with his green & golden eyes.
"Where's your ship?"
"Ship?"
"Yah. Like, you know, *Star Track* or that *Dr. Who*?"
"I said that I came here by dream."
"Wait. You're dreaming now?"
"I think so."
"*Sheeet.*" We smoke on.
I come to several hours later in my own room. Bed, one window with a card table & chair by it. My Smith-Corona on it. Sheaf of blank paper next to it. White-faced pink cat transistor radio.

So I sit here typing. *What do I do while here?* Warn everyone about the future? There's a lotta years from now to 2018.

I delay my decision—

Well, the rain exploded with a mighty crash
As we fell into the sun
And the first one said to the second one there
I hope you're having fun

Convince the Beatles to reunite? Get John Lennon the hell out of New York City? He & Paul McCartney had just jammed in Los Angeles a few months ago! *If* this is June 1974, that is.

I now notice there's a TV in the corner. I turn it on, but it's weird. There's a sort of confusing animation on every channel. Flowing images of space aliens & blue runners & sexy girls & spiders' lairs, & I realize, *of course, this is LSD-TV*. Even 2018 doesn't have this yet. Warped insects, disembodied noses, dancing torso candles, drums that start inside the mind & dance outward. *Is this the way back?*

Eyes smiling with wings. Carrots with crowns. Tiny cackling black & white pandy bears. White Bunny hopping long & high through the White Woods.

Noise. Faces. Drums. Deepenings. Bubbles.

Spaceships big as stars, stars on tips of tiny claws. Yes, this is the way back. *Do I want to go back? Can I save 2018? Can I save you all back there / then?*

I am now climbing back, up the too-steep steps of a long pillar deep in the earth, the music gentling in my mind, my eyes long shut to it all. *I can't save you all. 1974 can't save you all.* I feel the burden of returning, progressing years lay again upon me, I climb & climb & climb up the too-deep stairs. *Something must be up ahead.*

I'm sitting now in an old familiar armchair in a small & familiar Hut. Still White Woods, where 2018 isn't. But I'm nearer now.

Can I do it? Can I go back? Given the choice, even maybe-kinda-sorta, can I do this?

Open my eyes. Breathe in. Breathe out. *Once, twice, breathe, relax.*

Open my eyes. *Oh.* Eurydice before me on my present day window desk. A beloved girl nearby reading her thick book. 2018.

How? What? Why? They asked it then. We ask it now. No answers but what we craft, artfully, clumsily, day by day.

I'm here. You are here. No answers but what we are making by what we are doing, what we believe by how we choose to be. No answers but by our own hands, through our own eyes.

* * * * * *

Colin James

Two Men with Axes Burst Into Room,
Immediately Become Bored with One Another

I woke in the middle of the night around ten.
My guest was nowhere to be seen. I instinctively
plundered the glow light on the power box.

Someone had thrown a blanket over the Zombie fence.
You can never get used to their desire to get in,
nor Sophoclean litter discarded like presumptions.
I keep a twelve-bore shotgun in each room.

Soon there was a splattering of hope,
proceeding until reality was quite clear.
It was impossible to clean up this mess alone.
One must contact the ever-efficient Gore Revivalists.

They arrived exactly at dawn in a truck
with Florida plates, yet emphatically influential,
even offering a soothing temporal message.

The cleaning was continuous.
I never found my guest amongst the carnage.
Must remember to get blood checked for parasites.

* * *

Can't Deny Yourself the Pleasure

No trees have been destroyed during
the making of this hologram.
Let me walk you through it.

A side view of a hill,
long incline without barriers.
The brain has its preferences.
Someone's handiwork like graffiti
without the object backers
just nicely hanging there.

We used to be able to get
dry ice from the drugstore,
or was it the hardware man?

Don't know if it's an improvement.
The hill alarmed by allegory
approaches, rebuffs, repeats,
defers to the crush of you.

* * *

Discontent in the Planet Props Dept.

I have been out of it for some time
holding this rope impossible
to say exactly how long.

We have devised a set of signals.
If I get one tug on the rope,
I pull Venus into declaratory orbit.
If I get two tugs, Mars, etc.

Can't afford to daydream,
but there are periods when I do.
Litter from the many Plastic Ono Experiments
have stuck to me, I am inconceivably imbued.

Don't want to stoop to killing time but
there are currently too many sunsets to choose.

Revising the old theory on threes and sevens,
my notes float in dead letter data mode.
Due for some time off if you count infinitude.

* * * * * *

Look
ART

Jimmy Heffernan

Notes on Conspiracies and Corruption

I believe that the truth of the matter is far more terrifying,
that the real truth that dare not speak itself is that no one is in control, absolutely no one.
—Terence McKenna

I don't pretend to know what's really going on in the world, but all the conspiracy and control stuff seems a little silly. I don't think whatever machinations are underway are being conducted all that cleverly. Our species just isn't that smart, or competent. Some of these conspiracy theorists are giving the conspirators way too much credit.

* * *

Regarding conspiracies "running the show": What, exactly, would a conspiracy need to do that isn't already being done anyway? People are compelled to submit to everything that is happening by the checks and balances of the system itself.

* * *

I would call the machinations from the top echelons of the socioeconomic pyramid to be not so much about control, but about influencing and guiding society in certain behaviors—usually economic ones—with the intent to preserve the status quo as much as possible, in order to protect their own common interests. I think the truth is that no one is really properly in control, and major crises can cause catastrophe for anybody.

The world runs on detestable corruption more than it does on devious conspiracy.

* * *

The quest of Western civilization is the quest for *control*. In reality of course, control is nothing more than a quaint illusion. Even our very selves are only a biochemical reality. To believe we are actually in control of anything is a mythical fallacy.

* * *

There is no deliberate conspiracy running the show, but rather a set of common interests which act and appear as a functioning conspiracy—common interests among the super-rich and powerful—to keep things just exactly as they are—with more money and more power funneling upward all the time—which steer the course of society—and which dictate to a large extent what people are exposed to—and ultimately what they are thinking and doing as a result of this exposure.

These common interests are like a Turing Machine in that their effects so closely resemble a conspiracy while, in fact, the results we see are due to a confluence of factors—which inevitably come out of the

drive on the part of those with the most money—and therefore the most social leverage—to maintain the status quo—or something closely approximating it, at all costs.

* * *

It's much scarier to posit that no one has a handle on the world. In truth, the population is susceptible to a legion of potential crises. And no one, or group, really has control of the planet in any meaningful way.

* * *

The media are not run by a giant conspiracy. They are biased, and can be deceptive, and can promote falsehoods, but there is no shadow organization malevolently pulling the strings concerning what gets on TV. Every media source has its agenda, which is usually the agenda of whoever owns it. The producers, directors, writers, and editors play out this agenda, which is often pro-government, on their own.

To wit, I watched several of the TV news shows this past Sunday morning, and they were all decrying Russian involvement in the 2016 US presidential election. They didn't have to be told to broadcast that; that's the party line. Everyone more or less falls into lockstep and, yes, the media sucks and most of it is garbage, but there is no grand conspiracy. Just common interests and corruption.

* * *

I frankly find it hard to believe that the human species is smart enough to pull off a measured, controlled conspiracy, and get it right more than ten percent of the time.

Corruption and greed are the real enemies, not dastardly villains.

* * * * * *

Gregory Kelly

I am, I want, I have yet (Fragments)

i am an alloy of sorts,
a malleable piece of metal work.

* * *

i want to be
a fleeting
aurora
a ribbon come
unfastened
from your hair
a faint arc
whose shimmer
is on stage for
less than an hour.

* * *

there is a part of us that is not defined
like white space in a painting.

* * *

i want to dig
in the sand
a repetitive
motion.

* * *

i want
to be
a be
-ing void
of dark
matter.

* * *

i had potential once
like a match stick.

* * *

i want the light
that is within me

to be
like when astronomers discovered
Icarus

and mapped the trajectory
the path the star forged
its 9 billion light year
explore

your
light
has
finally
fallen
to
Earth.

* * *

i have yet
to find
my existence
fulfilled.

* * * * * *

Nathan D. Horowitz

Wooden Spacecraft

[Travel Journal]

I slept for a while, without a blanket, on the aforementioned scrappy pool table, next to Dave. In the middle of the night, he propped himself up on one elbow and spoke to me. By the tone of his voice I knew he was asleep.

"Design," he muttered, "a box we can all sit inside when we drink yagé."

Then he put his head back down.

A wooden spacecraft, I thought. *Won't be hard to make. Knock together some boards, six by six feet, with low walls we can lean back and rest our arms on. We'll sit inside on folded blankets and sing space travel songs till our vessel blasts up to the wheeling stars.*

I drifted off again, into the wheeling stars, thinking about Ricki and thinking about Ricki thinking about me, my thoughts wheeling between Ricki and me, wondering if she's wondering if I'm wondering about her, elsewhere on the wheeling earth under the wheeling stars.

Later I woke up, chilly, and moved into the shopkeeper's cloth hammock, whose ends were hung too close together. I curled up like an embryo. The breeze gently blew my mind from my body, and I slept.

Over a breakfast of instant coffee and cheese sandwiches, I reported to Dave what he'd said about designing a box to drink in. He shrugged it off. It didn't mean anything to him.

* * *

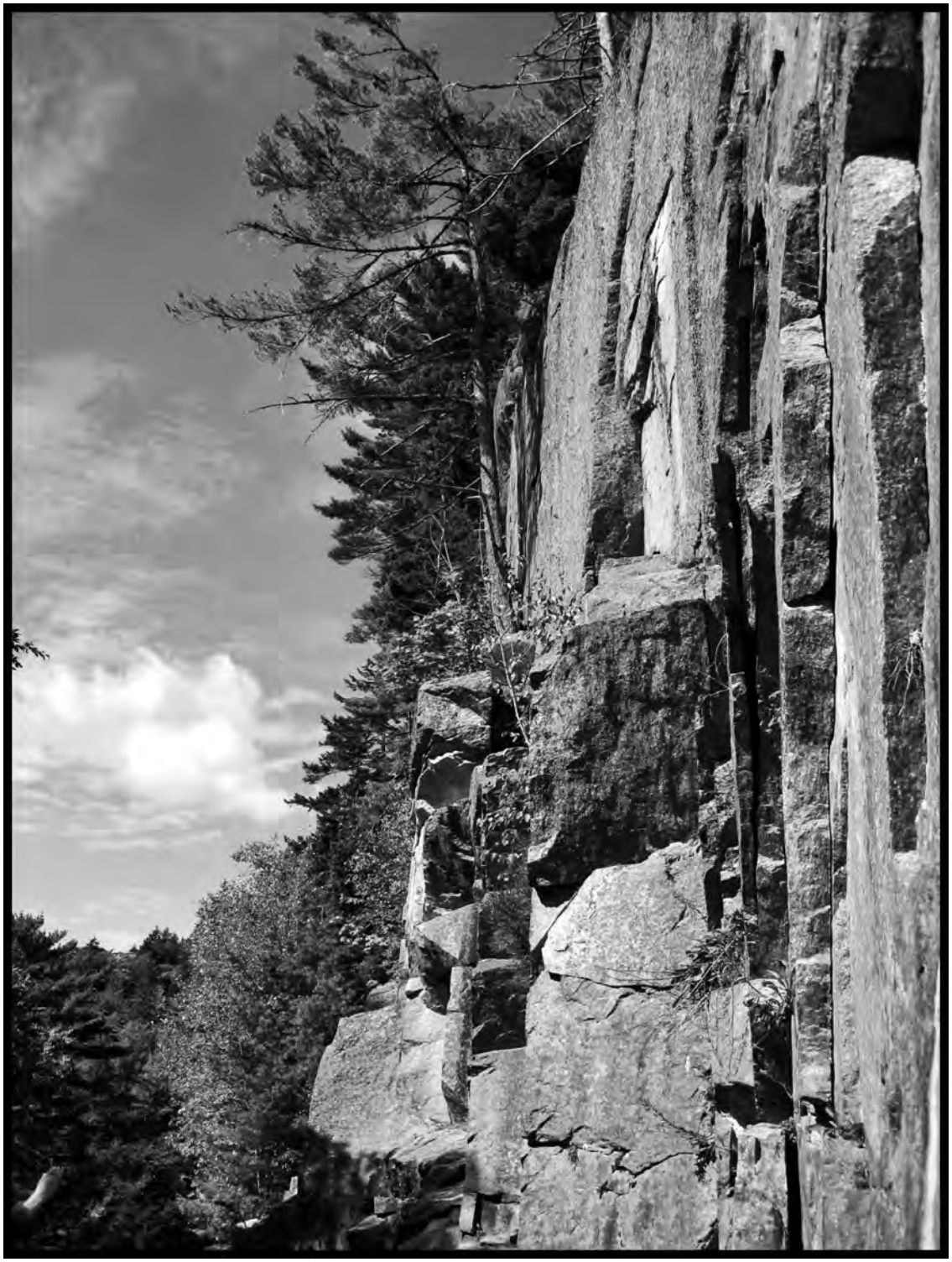
Now we're out on the Aguarico River again, floating eastward, in the direction of Peru, but heading for the Secoya village of San Pablo. We ride in Joaquín's hand-carved spacecraft of mönsé wood, the one we hauled two miles through the forest. Unfortunately, the outboard motor isn't running. The water pump is burned out. So, on a slow flow of water that snowed down from the high sky, and melted from the snowy Andes, we're gliding downstream. Morale is low. The pump was screwed up back at Poza Honda, where we could have had it fixed, but Joaquín didn't mention it to Dave, so Dave is pissed off. Maribel is silent, staying out of it. This may be a tacit admission that Dave has a point.

It's 10:37 now. We'll reach San Pablo in a few hours. We don't happen to have a paddle with us today. I angle the paper of this notebook so it doesn't reflect the sun into my eyes. Ryder's the only one who's happy. He's standing like a gondolier, sporadically paddling the canoe with the newly-purchased yellow broom with multicolored plastic bristles. Dave insisted on buying the multicolored broom, the *sieco yuaséopo*. The new hut doesn't have a floor yet, but when it does, we'll be ready.

Around us, rapid rhythm of crickets—entomo-techno trance, world beat of a beat world—and the sudden shivery silvery sing-song of a little brown bird flashing 'twixt canoe and sky. In no hurry, the river slithers over the landscape.

People up in the States wonder what I'm doing here in South America. I'm floating down a reptilian waterway, watching odd currents rise up in it, here and there, while up ahead, to the east, in the direction of Peru and Brazil, cumulous clouds rest on the horizon, like pawns in a chess game between God and the Devil.

South America. *Insí Hamú*, Rufino told me the Secoyas call it, after Pineapple the Armadillo, who convinced God to bring the land forth again from the waters. My plan, now, in *Insí Hamú*, is to



take the time I need to follow the footsteps of the armadillo who saved the earth, and the doctor who cured me of suicide: I want to study shamanism.

But this archaic, worldwide phenomenon imperfectly described with the anglicized Tungus word "shamanism"—what *is* it (if "is" is not too strong a word)?

For Nezahualcoyotl, it was experiencing sensations that arrive in the mind at various wavelengths of reality, advancing toward knowledge and ecstasy.

For Tritemio, it was healing—smoking tobacco and sucking disease out of a sick kid's tongue—and understanding the languages of mammals and birds.

And for me, a gringo neophyte? Certain experiences have suggested to me the phrase *death science,* because they have provided a way to test the waters of death without taking the plunge, while remaining safe and sound in the here and now. The shamanism, or the drink, apparently set into motion some of the psychological and physiological processes that accompany actual death. It's unprovable, but I imagine people waking up after they die, looking around, and thinking, "Horowitz was right. And yet, his words fell so woefully short of the thing itself."

And then there's the mythic dimension. This practice reminds us that we're living in an ancient myth, as the present is the antiquity of the distant future. Like gods and heroes, we quaff slumbering thunderstorms and bathe in molten ice. Our every action has infinite ramifications, even as we are ramifications of infinite previous actions. We reverberate through people whose souls we touch, and those they touch, as others reverberate through us, on and on. And some nights we drink a liquid yoga that yokes us to the uncreated ineffable. Like bees to flowers, we return to that great mystery. And that's another "thing" "shamanism" "is"—a sucking of the nectar of the blossoms that sway behind the visible world. More about this later, perhaps.

* * *

We slept in San Pablo. Now we're in the home of a Secoya named Daniel Payaguaje, just downriver from there.

To be precise, we're underneath his home, which is on stilts. This space is his workshop. He's trying to fix the motor. Animals abound: chickens, horses, dogs, a peccary, and an immature potu—which lives tied to a perch, looks like a little brown owl with a broad beak, and says *"Grrrrrrrrr!"* The Waorani family I stayed with had one of these too.

Daniel's the son of another drinker, currently deceased—Maribel's half-brother Ambrosio, who opposed her and Joaquín's marriage. Joaquín has told us that, on several occasions, Ambrosio sent jaguars to murder him. Joaquín remained unscathed but, once, the hit-cats eliminated his hunting dogs.

Jaguars again. We gringos are definitely not on the same page as the Secoyas about jaguars. The other day, Rufino told me: "For us, the jaguar is something like a demon. Some jaguars around here don't walk on the ground, but a meter above it." He must have seen the skepticism that flashed across my face because, for a moment, his held an expression that said, *I'd tell you more about this stuff if you weren't so damn stupid.* Then he changed the topic and told me about the next group of tourists he had coming in.

In San Pablo yesterday, Dave, Ryder, and I ate at the home of Eva, Maribel's older sister, a lovely woman with a long face and prominent ears. Like Maribel, she hasn't a single gray hair, though she's about seventy. When we mentioned Daniel was working on the motor, she told us a story about his dad.

"Back when we lived in Cuyabeno, Ambrosio went to Colombia to study with Cofan yagé drinkers. Before he left he told my mom she'd hear jaguars roaring before he came back—that'd be his signal. He was gone for three months. One day when my mom was out fishing in a stream, she heard jaguars roaring deep in the forest, and she said to me, 'Your brother's coming home.' The next day he

showed up on the river in a big canoe full of Cofans, the people he'd been staying with in Colombia."

I remembered the incident in Waorani territory where Pata dreamed his brother came and picked me up, and the dream came true the next day. People with no other method might be able to communicate over long distances using processes analogous to our telephone systems. Also, Dave told me my own arrival last year had been foretold by a bird.

We gringos listened to Eva's story without mentioning Joaquín's story about Ambrosio's having tried to murder him with jaguars. I, and I think the others, had mentally categorized Ambrosio as a bad guy. But his kid sister had adored him.

During dinner preparations, we dozed off on the floor pondering rainforest telecommunication. Eva woke us and fed us soup. Then we dozed off again. Later, we woke again and walked over to the home of Álvaro, one of the sons of Serafín the educator. In his late twenties, Álvaro is the president of the tribal government.

I'll need a visa soon. Before we went to sleep at Álvaro's place, I talked with him and Dave about teaching English in San Pablo for three months in return for a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting a volunteer visa for me.

I get the feeling that Álvaro and others in San Pablo suspect Joaquín of enriching himself by selling tribal secrets to outsiders. If I teach here, my work will be a gift from Joaquín to the community.

* * *

We're back at the provisional hut. Daniel finished fixing the motor yesterday at sunset. We got back here at 7:10 and unloaded the canoe and went to bed. I woke up before dawn with stomach trouble and, after an hour of rumbles, threw up. *It's not unusual,* I thought as I rinsed my mouth. *Odysseus had the same thing.* I fell back to sleep.

Just being sick here in the forest, swaying side to side in the hammock, mulling over memories, lost in the past again, in limbo between Ann Arbor, Senegal, and Siekoya.

I've started translating some of the stories from *The Yagé Drinker*.

The sun's hot and bright outside. Gnats are swarming like memories, whining in my ears, biting me.

But whose ears are these, really? This body was lent to me by the earth, and one day I'll have to give it back. Meanwhile, insects exercise their own rights to it.

* * *

At dawn, we drank an infusion of palm hearts soaked in water and cleansed ourselves again by vomiting. Afterwards I cooked soup and dug a trash pit. In the afternoon, we worked on the roof. Tomorrow morning, we're to wake at 3 a.m. and drink something else, a brew of some vine that'll make us throw up and get somewhat drunk. To cleanse us, to bring more light and clarity to our yagé visions.

My religious hypothesis of the day: *God periodically boils up the universe, drinks it down, dreams, and vomits up a new one.*

Joaquín has invited us to call him *Ha'kë,* Father—pronounced sort of like ha-KUH—and Maribel *Ha'ko,* Mother, ha-KO. He's also started calling us *Hijo,* the Spanish word for "son," which is easier than saying our weird, foreign names. He's still content, though, to call me Toanké.

* * *

I'm reading Serafín Piaguaje's autobiography *Medicine Root* to learn about San Pablo before I go live there. That village was founded in 1973 in collaboration with the Barclays, the gringo missionary couple; it's named after their hometown of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

In 1959, the Secoyas were living downriver in Cuyabeno, and the Barclays moved in with them. Maribel's sister Eva had two kids, Serafín, about ten, and Domingo, a toddler. Domingo got seriously ill. The yagé drinkers couldn't do anything for him. The Barclays gave him penicillin and he quickly recovered. Eva and her husband Carlos converted to Christianity. Formerly Francisco's designated yagé cook, Carlos withdrew from the small community of drinkers.

Serafín worked with the Barclays, teaching them Paicoca, and helping devise a system for writing it down so the couple could translate the New Testament into it, and it could become a written language.

Serafín, Domingo, and Dagoberto, the youngest brother, now grew up Christian. At twenty, Serafín married Elda, one of two girls from the Lucitande family, half-Cofan and half-Siona, who had recently moved to San Pablo from Colombia. Serafín had preferred the other sister, Alba, but his father pressured him to marry Elda, while Alba married another man, Lucho Payaguaje.

Serafín stayed married to Elda for twenty years, and had six children with her. He worked as a teacher, "planting the seeds of literacy among the Secoyas," as he told me, then acted as the community's first secular leader, the president of the *Organización de Indigenas Secoyas del Ecuador*.

Finally, he and Alba eloped to Lago Agrio, leaving their spouses, throwing the close-knit village into chaos. Domingo, by that time the pastor of San Pablo, expelled his older brother from the church. There were death threats. Serafín and Alba left for Colombia, where there was a government job in education with the Secoyas' old enemies, the Huitotos, but they found the environment there even more violent, with revolutionaries and paramilitaries and narco-traffickers.

So they returned to Lago, where they now spend most of their time. Serafín works in the provincial department of bilingual education; the government's enlightened policy is that indigenous kids should be educated both in their own tribal language and in Spanish.

* * *

Morning at the provisional hut. Clear gray rain. Sweet, hot, yellow chucúla. Steaming, glossy, microcosmic chucúla. Record-of-all-that-happens-in-the-forest chucúla. Peel ripe, yellow and/or black plantains. Not green ones. Boil them till they're soft. Stick your nose into the fragrant, mouth-watering steam. Haul that warm goodness through your happy nostrils down to your lungs. Beat the plantains till they semi-dissolve. Decide it would be impossible to specify a point at which they cease being plantains and become chucúla.

Turn off the gas stove and ladle the buttercup soup of bliss into a gourd. Watch the chucúla cool. The Rorschach-Rimbaud thing doesn't work: the steam just looks like steam—but maybe like a naked dancer. Sip the thin, sour-sweet liquid. Then finish the succulent goop with a spoon. It's a *comebebe*, someone told me, an eat-drink. And it tastes different each time, sweeter, sourer, softer, chunkier, depending on how ripe the plantains are, how long they're boiled, what their genes are, where and how they grew, what they thought about while they were growing . . .

* * *

Rapid rhythm of rain on plastic roof tarps. Water spilling off bamboo roof poles into big aluminum pots that are already full.

* * *

In *The Yagé Drinker*, Francisco mentions a witch named Yaitarí, a Siona who used to live near here. *Yaitarí* means jaguar turtle, a footnote explains.

I said, "Don Joaquín, do you know anything about Yaitarí?"

Joaquín said, "He was a powerful shaman, but very evil. Liking to turn into a jaguar. Killing several people that way. I killing him myself, together with Baltasar, who lives in San Pablo now. My wife with us, up in a tree for safety. Yaitarí in the form of a huge black jaguar. We shooting to stop it. Baltasar and I both firing. Again. Again. It crawling toward us. I shooting it in the head. Then chopping off the head, machete. Even after the head was off, trying to bite us. We cutting open the chest. Jaguar having . . . " (Joaquín counted on his fingers) "one, two, three, four, five hearts. Afterwards, Yaitarí was dead."

I said, "What do you mean, afterwards, he was dead?"

"Yaitarí was at home smoking tobacco in his hammock while it going on. When I shooting the jaguar in the head, Yaitarí screaming, 'Ay, my head!' When I cutting off the jaguar's head, he screaming, 'Ay, my neck!' Then he dying."

Dave said, "How did he get the 'tarí' part of his name?"

"One of his feet normal, the other having no toes. All joined at the end."

I went to bed thinking about Yaitarí. In my dream, just before waking up this morning, an archaeologist friend is excavating Yaitarí's tomb. Mummified, the sorcerer wears a white tunic and white shell bead necklaces. He's sitting in the lap of a huge cross-legged stuffed jaguar that's embracing him, both of them facing the sky. The jaguar has the head of a white crane. I look for Yaitarí's turtle foot but, at the ankle, the leg becomes the tail of a boa and wraps back up around the body to entwine itself in the shell necklaces.

* * *

The rain let up, so we got in a full day's work on the roof. The palm fronds ran out. We can go cut more.

Dave related a Waorani story to the rest of us gringos. "Grandfather Wepe, the one who killed the missionary, told me where snakes come from. Long ago, before Europeans were around, two brothers were on a hunting trip. They stopped for the night and built a lean-to out of palm fronds. They were sitting under it in a light rain when they heard a frog calling. The younger brother understood what she was saying.

"'She wants to suck my dick!'"

Ryder cracked up. Mark barely smiled. Dave looked around at us all and went on.

"The older brother's like, 'Don't go. It could be dangerous.'

"The younger brother's like, 'I want it bad. I'm going out there.'

"The younger brother ran out and found the frog and stuck his dick in her mouth. She clamped down *hard* and *ran* up a palm tree backwards! *Foing!* The younger brother's dick was stretched *twelve meters long!* He was like, '*Help! Older Brother! Aaahhh!*'

"The older brother telepathically summoned the woodpecker! The bird flew to the tree. *Tat tat tat tat tat tat tat!* The younger brother's dick fell to the ground in twenty different pieces. Each piece became a snake and slithered away, and that's why there are snakes!"

That explains it. A great story, a great storyteller. I envy Dave. Can't shake the feeling. He's a few years younger than I am, but with way more experience in the jungle. He's good-looking and in great shape. He has tons of charisma and finds it easy to organize people to work on projects. He's got a gorgeous sister who actually came all the way from Quito to visit him on his birthday. I, in contrast, have no sister, and feel nothing but envy for those who do. Sisters are a great thing to have. For instance, when you're studying shamanism in the jungle, they bring you boxes of food. And if your parents divorce, they can talk with you about it so you don't lose your damn mind.

To top it off, Dave's parents actually support what he's doing here. Mine, on the other hand, can't get past the idea that their only offspring, the son they fought each other for two and a half years in the court system to get custody of, the son whose boarding school and college were so highly rated

and so expensive, has thrown away the possibility of a normal career to go drink drugs with Indians in the jungle.

Dave's got support, in other words, while I'm in this enterprise against my family's wishes, alone. An only child, a lonely child, the last of my lineage, solo-tripping across the world, peering in the windows at other people's families.

I mull these things over while Dave goes about his business, whistling and accusing me of being arrogant and lazy.

When his sister visited, though, I overheard them conversing one night in low voices about "him," about "his drinking," and some trouble it'd caused. And I remembered everybody has serious problems of one sort or another.

One day, out of the blue, as if reading my mind, Dave said to me, "Nate, don't *ever* be envious of me. You've got *no* idea what I've been through."

* * *

Ryder hitched a ride out on a colonist's canoe. Next day, another wooden spacecraft brought Mark's brother, Gus. This arrival was unforeseen, and had not even been announced by the oracle of a bird flying through the hut, as mine had. Back in the States, months ago, Mark had told Gus about this project to build a traditional hut; Gus had Dave's name, plus the address of a hostel in Quito that Dave was known to frequent. Knowing a little Spanish, Gus found his way, mostly over land, from California, and here he is.

With his clear blue eyes and curly brown hair, Gus reminds me of a Renaissance painting my dad showed me of the Archangel Michael calmly stomping on the Devil. Around his neck, Gus wears a choker woven of hemp adorned with a single blue-green ceramic bead. He made the bead and the choker at an artists' collective in Mexico.

The evening he arrived, he shared some of his story. Last year he went around Japan on a grant, studying art. A painter, he's halfway through college, taking another year off. At twenty-two, he's a year older than Mark.

He said that one night on acid a few years ago, he and Mark had decided to leave Austin, Texas the next morning with what they were wearing, and simply travel until they reached Machu Picchu in Peru. Mark confirmed this and finished the story: they'd ended up going to bed and, when they woke up, they sensibly didn't want to go on the trip anymore.

Mark recalled that one day when they were ten and eleven years old, he and Gus were in a mall. They'd just come out of a toy store when Gus said, "Hey, I bet you won't remember me saying this in an hour." Mark responded, "Not only will I remember you saying that in an hour, I'll remember it tomorrow." And every so often, he kept reminding Gus and himself of it, until the line was indelibly written in their minds.

We sat in silence then, listening to the chirping, whirring forests of our memories, wondering how long we'd remember this particular moment.

* * *

Another day, a skinny guy with big brown eyes and a huge pack on his back staggered up the muddy path from the river and presented a note someone had given him directing him to Joaquín's place. Not sure he wanted the guy to stay, Dave grouched at him. I figured the guy was probably carrying some money intended for Joaquín, so we should keep him around.

When François said he worked as a chef in five-star restaurants in Quebec, and that he was actually in possession of a dozen eggs, he was in like Flynn as far as I was concerned. Though this place is infested with chickens pecking holes in our sacks of rice and corn, we have no right to their eggs—

they're Maribel's. Dave was still ready to chuck François out on his ear unless Ha'kë gave his permission for the Québécois to stay.

François explained he was seeking help for a medical problem. He had *Herpes nerviosa*, a kind of herpes that the body generates by itself in response to stress. Two years earlier it had been triggered by a piece of bad news. I asked him what that was and he said he didn't want to talk about it.

Joaquín strolled over, met François, said he could stay. François stowed his backpack on the sleeping platform of the provisional hut and talked with us gringos.

He'd just come from the town of Baños, where the jungle meets the mountains, and where Dave, coincidentally, maintains an apartment. Just outside of Baños, François had had a visionary experience after drinking a brew of San Pedro cactus. The trip had lasted a day and a half, much longer than he'd expected.

"The sacred plants always give us a bit more than we think we can handle," Dave observed sagely.

François went on to say that, after he'd drunk the dose, he sat by himself near a waterfall outside of town. When the effects began, a butterfly flew to him and rested on his knee for a long, long time as he marveled at its colors and its fearlessness. He contemplated the waterfall's thunderous voice, the gleaming, sunlit vapor, the scintillating particles of rainbow. In the evening, black clouds gathered and broke open.

François sheltered from the storm in the mouth of a cave, marveling at the lightning, observing webs of energy pulsing in the sky. He lay awake all night in the cave, butterflies flashing like rainbows through the darkness of his mind. He made it back into town the next afternoon, wondering what had happened to him.

"What does it mean?" François asked us.

Dave took a shot at it. "The San Pedro spirit lets you see supreme, subtle things humans can't usually see, like those energy webs in the clouds. About the butterfly, sometimes a nonhuman notices we've broken out of the purely human paradigm, and we're ready to communicate with nonhumans. They respond to that, because they're people too."

I jumped in. "That vision you had of all those butterflies reminds me of what it says in this book I'm reading called *The Yagé Drinker*, that one of the first visions an apprentice shaman has is of a huge number of butterflies. I've never seen them myself. Have you, Dave?"

"Yeah, for sure! Millions of 'em."

* * *

We chopped down twelve more palm trees for the roof. Gus taught me Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and I taught him "Full fathom five" from Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

A thought bubble formed over Dave and Mark's heads:

OH, SHIT.
THE SOFT MEN
HAVE FOUND EACH OTHER,
AND THEY'VE STARTED IN
WITH THE POETRY.
HOW THE FUCK ARE WE GONNA
GET THIS ROOF BUILT?

* * *

"*¿Ñata wahë?*" Joaquín calls to us quietly as he arrives—Fresh morning?

"*Ñata wahëwë*," we respond—It is a fresh morning.

"*Deóhi*," he confirms—Good.

Then he falls silent, limping toward us. *"Que dolor fuerte,"* he murmurs, leaning on a post—What strong pain. He points to his lower back, right hip, and right leg.

"The witchcraft hurting again," he says. *The sciatica*, we think.

He reclines in a hammock. Dave goes over and massages his lower back, hip and leg.

* * *

Cloud people sift pale gray light down to us, light that greens as it seeps through and glances off leaves before landing on my white paper, where I encode it in language so your mind can see it.

Mild wind slips through the huge, archaic, multidimensional leaves of the banana plants. In this wind, old, calm events from prehistoric times quietly resonate. Soon we'll cross the river to collect floorboards that Martín, Katia's youngest brother, cut for us.

* * *

We carried two dozen planks from inside the forest to the riverbank, then into the canoe, before motoring back here. It'll be nice when the new hut has a floor—giving the *sieco yuaséopo*, the broom of many colors, something to sweep.

* * *

As we finished hauling the planks up from the river, I pretended to stumble and hit my head on one of the posts that hold up the roof, in order to amuse Maribel, who laughed and called me crazy. Afterwards, dark eyes flashing, Dave confronted me: "Why'd you do that? Why'd you act like a clown?"

"Why's it your business?"

"Because it makes the rest of us look bad."

"No, it doesn't."

"It's disrespectful to the Secoyas and to us."

"No, it isn't." I was confident I was right. "Go on about your business. Do your thing the way you think is appropriate and I'll do the same with mine."

"Nate, I humbly advise you to think about this."

"I'll give that suggestion all the attention it deserves." Our eyes locked like the antlers of stags. For once, Dave pulled away first.

* * *

At Joaquín's bidding, Mark and I brewed yagé in a clearing near the provisional hut.

Mark said, "A friend of my dad's is an anthropologist who did research in Papua New Guinea in the 1970s. He told me the males in the tribe he studied go through a series of initiations throughout their lives."

"Yeah?"

"This village is way up in the mountains. The name of the place is Telefomin. The boys, when they're about ten, get taken into a hut in the forest and denied food and water and light. And the men tell them sacred stories about how the universe began, and how society came to be. Then when they're about twenty, it happens again. Only, this time, the guys initiating them say, 'Actually, last time, we *lied* to you about the origin of the universe and humanity. *This* is what really happened.' And they tell them

different stories. Ten years later, the same thing happens again, and so on and so on."

"That sounds annoying, but, OK . . ."

"To me, it's a model for how any society's knowledge works. Usually we're ready to fight and kill for our opinions. But truths are always provisional. Like this hut we're living in now. So what're our opinions worth, Toanké? They're just calculations based on aging knowledge. And when the next truth is ready—the one that'll be cleaner, last longer, and keep the rain out better—we'll move right into it. Like the Papuans who replace a story whose time is over with a newer one."

"All right."

"That's the way science works, lettin' its paradigm get shifted. There'll be scientific advances in five hundred years that'll make us today look like chimps pokin' twigs into termite nests."

* * *

The effects of the yagé prove surprisingly weak. I'm bedrazzled—my neologism of the moment—by mild, glittery energy dripping down from the sky. Simultaneously, I sense benevolent brown dragons populating the surrounding forest. It's their territory, on a slightly different Nezahualcoyotlian wavelength from ours.

Later, I see multicolored beads dancing in the darkness, after images of a bracelet I made in the morning. They're pretty, but that's all.

I fall asleep.

* * *

Over breakfast, Joaquín said that, before we drank, a horse must have invaded from his neighbor Daniel's place upriver. The horse must have trampled what Joaquín called the "path of visions," which went from the sky to the yagé plant to the place we were cooking it. The path of visions sounded like a fragile umbilicus or cable connecting the brew with the heavens.

But, despite the interruption of that connection, *Ñañë*—God—descended from the sky, and entered Joaquín, and showed him a pus-covered sickness-demon attacking François, unable to get inside the young man, but wrapped around him.

Joaquín went on that Ñañë had driven the demon away, shouting at it, "What are you doing to my son? Get out of here and don't come back."

"God called me his son?" echoed François, moved, when this information was translated to him. "My father died when I had twelve years."

Dave said, "I saw the demon too. It looked like a man with no skin on his face."

"Muy sucio," added Joaquín about the demon. "*Abrazando. Queriendo entrar. Esa medicina que usted toma no dejando entrar, solo abrazando*." Very dirty. Embracing. Wanting to enter. That medicine you take not letting enter, only embracing.

But the intoxication of the yagé had been hard for Joaquín, he admitted. It's supposed to produce brightness of vision and clarity of hearing, but because the horse had trampled the path of visions, this batch brought him only darkness and deafness.

Joaquín told François to stop taking his pills and start applying the juice of the rasped bark of the *mi'a* tree. He took a machete and showed the Canadian how to do this.

Afterwards, François commented to Dave and me, "In the ceremony, don Joaquín turned into a snake and crawled up my ass and fixed things inside me. Then he went out again. It was very strange. But if it works, I am happy."

* * *

In his mid-twenties, Martín Piaguaje, who cut the floorboards for the new hut, is Rufino's wife Katia's youngest and biggest brother. He had a vibe of barely-suppressed violence when we talked with him about the boards the other day. Or maybe it's just that he doesn't like Joaquín.

Joaquín told us later, "He loving to fight. Beating his wife. She committing suicide."

Tiny black flies loving it when I write. A cloud of them munching on my ankles, leaving tiny red spots.

* * *

"If the Indians only knew the friggin' *power* they have to say *no*, man," Dave is saying to Mark. He's referring to the fact that oil companies have been drilling in the area for thirty years, massively polluting the jungle. Only recently have the Indians had any rights at all in the matter.

The Secoyas are currently weighing the possibility of letting a company search for oil on this land, in exchange for money for medicine, scholarships, and development projects. The problem is that the tribal government holds legal title only to the surface of their land, and the government could decide to push them off.

"Se'me guaguita, no más," just a young paca, announces Joaquín, appearing at this moment, smiling brightly, sauntering over to our hut with an aluminum pot. "Go ahead and eat. There's enough for everyone here."

* * * * * *

The Feathered Sea

It's 2007 and my father is about to die again.
Standing in a courtyard in Vienna, he operates a hand pump
from which issues fire rather than water.
From my apartment window, I watch,
writing with the brisk pencil of solitude.
The courtyard burns like paper.
My father dons the starry glasses of summer
and vanishes in the flames.

It's 1998 and my father is about to die again.
The city of Quito gently underlines the sky.
My father has been recruited to break holes in time.
His intelligence blurs the office chairs,
giving him twice the impact.
With a cobblestone, he hammers my desk.
It smashes into crystals like a geode.

It's 1975 and my father is about to die again.
In Rome, a firestorm outlines my family in broken glass.
Unfazed, my father weaves ambulance
and police sirens on a loom of insomnia.
I open the basement window and glimpse a forest.
The humming wind blows in a shivering typewriter.
My father pauses from his weaving
to tap out disordered circumlocutions.

It's 2013 and my father is about to die again.
In Ann Arbor, he signs his papers
and plunges feet-first into the feathered sea.

* * * * * *

Bags End News
No. 299 March 17, 2001
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Beegel 4or a Day!

In mah strang & strangley weerd & weerdley wondrful & wondrful strang homland cawld Bagzend yor old pal Algernon iz besett biy meny a fo az he stumps stedily throo hiz daye but I amm allso welthey beyond greenbakkd tertels with frends to.

Wun uf mah bezt frends is Prinsess Crisykah uf Imageana wich iz wun uf the bettr fantaseylands ekstint haha funy ol me!

Enyway mah frend Crisy haz thiz strang altho not displeezin hero wership uf beegels lik yors [illegible]

Bags End News
No. 300 March 24, 2001
Guest Editor: Crissy Beagle
Guest Assistant: Alexander Puppy
Guest Advisor: Algernon Beagle
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Us Beegels on thee Prowll!

Yor old pal Crisy Beegel iz riting thiz nuwzpapr thiz week cuz Algernon sed I cood. Algernon maks mah hartbon very hapy ☺ cuz he is a veree guud frend & verey funy & alott smartr than he noz.

I think Algernon werryd that I wood get in trubel az a beegel in Bagzend but he 4ergets that I am stil Crisy an dont think about hiz hom the waye he dez. Algernon luvs trubel evin tho it skers him az then he kan rit hiz nuwz papr & tel awl about wat hapens. But he letz som gyz puzh him around waye too much. I think that he dez it 4or the dramah & nowe he

Bags End News
No. 301 March 31, 2001
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Beegels Biy thee Dezzens!

Thiz iz yor old uzuell pal Algernon riting mah nuwzpapr aftr my deer frend Princes Crisakah uf Imagiana hadd a tern az a litel prezent frum mee too her. She allso gott too bee Onorery Beegel 4or a Daye 4or thee meney kindneses she haz bin towrd mee 4or so long. Shee reeley likd beeing a beegel & shee did a guud job uf it to in her owne Crisy waye.

But this plas iz kalld Bagzend nott Ozz or Narnea or som wel-behavd & ko-operativ fantasey-land. Beeing Bagzend meens trubel kuming & going so wen trubel kam thiz scribeling litel gy dident' [illegible]

Bags End News
No. 302 April 7, 2001
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Betsee Buny Pilloz' Nuw Exxil!

Wel, deer reedrz, so much 4or mah nuwzpapr beeing uthr thann slav too the xxployts uf the big gys around Bagzend. Yess ser, itz' tim too get bak too the uzel kindz uf storeyz.

Wel, sortuf. I meen thiz nuw storey I dont' think iz the kind Betsee Buny Pillo wood rathr I told on her.

Betsee Buny Pillo haz bin xxild frum the Buny Pillo Freey Stat wich she helpd too mak! I waz shokkd & thawt mebee it had too doo with Farmr Jonses whoo uzd too run thee Buny Pillo Farm wich wood gro pilloz & sel themm too rich peepel.

Algernon Beagle

Bags End Book #10: Beagle for a Day!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

******

Beagle for a Day!

In mah strange & strangely weird, & weirdly wonderful, & weirdly strange homeland called Bags End, your old pal Algernon Beagle is beset with many a foe as he stumps steadily through his day

but

I am also wealthy beyond greenbacked turtles with friends too.

One of mah best friends is Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna, which is one of the better fantasylands extinct, haha, funny ol' me!

Anyway, mah friend Crissy has this strange altho not displeasing hero worship of Beagles, like yours truly & most humbly, o shucks!

Princess Crissy is so nice to me & smart & funny & cute, not to mention how she protects me from the crazed plans of certain all-about-me big guys in Bags End, that I came up with this strange idea to thank her & to show her what being a Beagle is really like!

Mah friend Lory Bunny helped me write a little note to Crissy asking her to come see me at Milne's Porch in Bags End outside mah bedroom window. Then I went to see mah friend Miss Chris in Connecticut, as I needed her help too.

So one fine day after school me & Miss Chris & mah no account still brother named Alexander Puppy & our friend Allie Leopard were all waiting 4or Crissy to arrive at Milne's Porch, which she did on time & happy smiling.

"Algernon!" she said all happy, & hugged me first, & then she yelled, "MC!" & I was confused, but she hugged Miss Chris so that was OK. And Alex & Allie got their hugs too, & that crazed brother talked to Crissy & Miss Chris in Bump language, & they talked back till I cried, "Listen here, ya manic relative, this is a English speaking situation so, um, you better know that!" Alex looked at me with many Bump words in his eyes, but just smiled. Ha.

I had Crissy sit in mah comfy chair, & Alex & Allie sat with her. Me & Miss Chris stood just like we planned.

"Crissy, it was mah idea to do something nice for your Beagle-loving ways, & Miss Chris helped me do it."

"Bump!" said Alex happily.

"Alex says, Yayy, Crissy! Yayy, Algeron!" explained Allie with nice green eyes & his smart languages-knowing brain.

I looked at Alex's silly face smiling, & couldn't get mah mushy Beagle's heart to scold him right now.

"And Alex helped me by staying on his side of our bedroom while I planned," I said sorta nicely.

"Bump!" Alex yelled happily but Allie didn't say what he meant cuz of mah look.

Crissy was laughing very hard & so was Miss Chris, so I supposed it was all still OK.

I looked at Crissy's nice face & remembered why we were here. "Crissy, to show you how much I love you & like you too, I am going to make you an Honorary Beagle 4or a Day!"

Crissy was shocked & beyond smiling. I kept talking, hoping she wasn't mad.

"As part of your honorary Beagle 4or a Day activities, you will be Guest Editor of mah beloved & by some behated newspaper called Bags End News!"

Crissy kept getting more & more surprised so I figgered I had better finish up fast.

"And finally, Miss Chris, who is the best Artist I know, has made you a Honorary Beagle 4or a Day costume to wear on your special day, & keep as a souvenir."

And Miss Chris dragged out from under the very comfy chair where we had hided it Crissy's Beagle costume. There was a facemask with Beagle nosebone & floppy ears, & a body part that was brown & white with a tailbone all like mine. I had posed 4or Miss Chris while she made a drawing to make the costume from.

Crissy looked so silent & shocked I got worried I had made her mad.

"You OK, fella?" I asked, all nervously.

Crissy stood up & came over to me & gave me THE BIGGEST HUG.

"Thank you so much, Algernon!" she said, happier than happiest. Then she hugged Miss Chris, which made sense, & Allie Leopard too, but mah brother Alex got in on the act, not just to hug but to talk Bump way too much too.

Me & Miss Chris helped Crissy on with her costume, & she even walked on all 4 paws like me.

"Bump?" said Alex curiously, but even be4ore Allie could translate, Crissy said, "What's wrong with good ol' fashioned English, fella?"

Wow. Crissy looked & talked just like me, but she wasn't me or a talking mirror!

Well, Alex tried to Bump Crissy some more, but she yelled, "Help! The Bumps are coming at me in clumps!" & she runned through mah bedroom window back into Bags End.

"Bump!" said Alex all unhappy, & he sat down to suck his toe sadly. Gee, I kinda felt bad 4or him, but that made me feel weird, which made me feel curious, which made me want to know what Crissy was doing now.

First I had to make Alex happy again, so mah mushy Beagle heart would quit bugging me. Miss Chris was holding him in mah comfy armchair, & Allie was sitting next to her looking all worried.

"Now, Alex," I said, fulla future regrets. "Crissy doesn't know that I have made you her assistant while she writes mah newspaper. And you have to help me watch out 4or her cuz she don't know the dangers & travails of being a Beagle in Bags End. You're not too upset to do that, are you?"

Well, I saw mah crazed brother's happy Bump! in his eyes be4ore he yelled it, & so I skittered away just in time through the window to go find Crissy who really did need looking out 4or. Miss Chris & Alex & Allie Leopard runned after me.

I hurried 4or awhile, not knowing where that Crissy Beagle could be when I suddenly heard a yelling Baby's voice.

O great! Silly ol' Sargent Lisa Marie Chow of the Army of the Babys! She was yelling at Crissy Beagle in the hallway near Sheila's Throne Room.

"You dwaftdwodging inswumbordinate Bweagleface!" Lisa yelled. She was wearing her usual green M*A*S*H shirt & green diaper cuz she thinks Hawkeye is her daddy.

"Beagles don't march! We write our newspaper, & stump slowly from here to there, & avoid all foods but one!" said Crissy Beagle.

"O All Foods but One! Yuk!" we both yelled at the same time.

Well, now Sargent Lisa saw both of us Beagle guys standing there. "Cwourt Mwarshals 4wor all Bweagles!" she yelled.

Just then, more trouble showed up named Betsy Bunny Pillow. I didn't wait to jaw & reason. "Run!" I yelled, & grabbed Crissy's pawbone, & fled!

*****

Us Beagles on the Prowl!

Your old pal Crissy Beagle is writing this part of the story cuz Algernon said I could. Algernon makes my heartbone very happy cuz he is a very good friend & very funny & a lot smarter than he knows.

I think Algernon worried I would get in trouble as a Beagle in Bags End, but he forgets I am still Crissy & don't think about his home the way he does. Algernon loves trouble, even though it scares him, cuz then he can write his newspaper & tell all about what happens. But he lets some guys push him around way too much. I think he does it for the drama & now he thought that me being in trouble would be the newest drama.

But I had other ideas. I know Algernon is smarter than he knows, & braver then he knows too when he gave me the wonderful present of making me Beagle for a Day. I decided he should get something good from it too.

So I began stirring up the dust toot sweet—haha!

Algernon wanted to grab me & run when he found me facing down little Lisa Marie Chow & Betsy Bunny Pillow. But I pulled him just a wee harder than he pulled me & I

said," Wait a minute, Algernon."

He waited like he was fleeing without moving.

"Gweneral Bwetsy, Swir, I hwave dwetained thwis pwair of inswubordinate Bweagles for your intwerogation," said little Lisa Marie, who thinks she is a soldier.

Betsy bounced up to us & looked us up & down with what Algernon calls her no-face.

"Two of you now, eh?" she whispered. Algernon trembled, so I held his paw tighter. I thought this all was funny.

" Pwermission to thwow thwem in thwe bwig, Swir?" asked Lisa.

Betsy continued her slow thoughtful bounce.

" Which one of you is Algernon?" she demanded. Before my trembling friend could respond, I stepped forward.

"That would be me, you dum Pillow!" I said in my best Beagle voice.

I knew Algernon would panic so I just looked back at him & smiled & winked. He stayed put though still buzzing with fear.

Betsy bounced right up to me & looked me in my face." Is this other Beagle here to watch your final end?" she whisperscreamed.

Then I did the one thing bullies HATE. I laughed in her no-face. But said no words.

Even Lisa backed away now. I heard Algernon whimper, so I smiled twice as hard at him, & winked first one eye, then the other. He didn't run, barely.

Betsy tried to cover up her embarrassment by saying nothing & not moving, & staring at me with her un-eyes unblinking.

I had to break her there & then, so I said in a Algernon dropped to a Betsy whisper," Don't be afraid, little Pillow, we all meet our match sometime."

Lisa started crying & Algernon ran. Then he remembered me & crawled back. Betsy bounced back a few steps & then flew at me, to smother me but good.

And at that moment I saw my friend Algernon do the bravest thing I have ever seen. He ran to where Betsy was trying & failing to smother me & yelled," Hey! Ya great big DUM PILLOW! That is mah friend Crissy! Leave her alone! I AM ALGERNON! Smother me! Or don't!"

Then he finally noticed something. I wasn't being smothered. I had Betsy crazy from mah ticklings of her secret tickle spot that my kid MC had taught me. She would lunge at me, & I would tickle her, & she would flop around laughing. Lunge. Tickle. Flop. Laugh. Over & over till she was too tired to do it anymore.

" Crissy!" Algernon said, looking so surprised & cute.

Lisa finally helped her poor General away, & out of the shadows stepped MC, Alex, & Allie Leopard!

MC was grinning at me." O Crissy!" she said, & hugged me a lot.

Alex Bumped me congratulations & thanked me for keeping his brother safe. When Algernon demanded translation, Allie said," Alex says YAYYY!" That was funny!

I knew Betsy would be back with a new plan sooner or later. And there were other big guys in Bags End who would not go for Algernon having an ally.

"Crissy," said Algernon. He still looked upset. I guess he's used to the way things are, & probably thinks" things change = worse."

I hugged Algernon & motioned MC & Allie & Alex to hug him too. I think that helped some.

" We should go back to Milne's Porch before there's any more trouble," Algernon said when he had been fully hugged.

So we all trooped back there, & gathered ourselves into Algernon's comfy armchair. It was very cozy but not crowded at all.

Soon we fell into a Clustered Dreaming that was so much fun. In it, we were ALL Beagles & playing a strange game in a big field. We were throwing words back & forth to each other, & sometimes the words would stick together to become like a big ball!

I had a hard time at first telling who from who but then I saw how Allie Beagle still had his pretty green eyes, & Alex Beagle spoke Bump though with a Beagle accent, & MC Beagle had freckles even on her Beagle furry face. Algernon was easy cuz he was way more deeply Beagle than all of us put together.

Everybody woke up together & liked the dream a lot! I think Algernon did too, but I asked him to be sure.

" Well," he said slowly," I am used to being the only local Beagle, & I am not used to being popular. But that game was fun."

I wanted Algernon to be happy again in his usual high-strung way. He is a humble guy & not used to so much attention on him.

But he did make me Beagle for a Day, & the day was not over yet, so I wanted to do more in Bags End to show that Algernon is special. I had to do this while I still had on my Beagle costume.

But first it was time to watch the Blondys play with the sunset. What the 3 of them do is float deeper into the sky & look like they're surrounding the sun. Then they drop through the sky toward the horizon as the sun does.

The fun part is when just for a moment it looks like the Blondys & the sun are rising again instead of setting! It's very strange & then it's over before you know it with a "YAYY Sun!" cheer from Simi the Baby Blondy.

Everybody cheered & clapped loudly cuz it is always a kind of privilege to see the Blondys 3 Sunset Dance.

Then it was night time & surely more strange things would happen.

I think if Algernon had looked at the right moment to see my tricky smile, he would have shuddered with worry & glee!

******

Beagles by the Dozens!

This is your old usual pal Algernon writing this story again after Princess Crissy had a turn as part of mah honorary Beagle 4or a Day present to her, for the many kindnesses she has been toward me 4or so long. She really liked being a Beagle, & she did a good job of it in her own Crissy way.

But this place is called Bags End, not Oz or Narnia or some well-behaved & cooperative fantasyland. Being Bags End means trouble coming & going & coming again some more, so when new trouble came, this scribbling guy did not huff twice in surprise.

It is not usually in mah Beagle nature to mull at length, but recently I have begun to wonder more often at the nature of me. Hmm.

Anyway, there is only one Beagle in Bags End most times. And the only famous Beagle I know of is Snoopy, who I guess mostly likes sleeping & palling around with those little birdies.

There is mah long-lost Mommy Beagle, & mah crazed sister Alice, & that crazed somehow relative old guy named Doctor Horatio Algernon with his aches & pains, but not even they have plagued me much of late.

So mah mullings most ask: am I more Beagle or more Algernon? I mean, when Princess Crissy is made a Honorary Beagle for a day by me & Miss Chris, what does it mean to be a Honorary Beagle? 4or Crissy, it meant being like me, I guess, but when beset by longtime Beagle foes, she laughed very Crissy at their ways.

Anyway, I thought Crissy had had enough fun, but I guess not. She is a strange lass, but I like her always good enough a lot.

I guess she just wanted to show Bags End that I am an OK guy & all, but I could have told her that Bags End guys learn at 2 speeds. Slow & not

at all.

But Crissy had her ideas. She led us to Sheila's Throne Room after a nice safe time on Milne's Porch.

Sheila & Crissy are two of the good big guys & kind of like sisters, tho a Bunny & peoplefolk girl. Anyway, when I am with them, I feel double safety. No crowns, which 4or Crissy is easy & 4or Sheila is harder I think.

Miss Chris is a good big guy too but she wasn't there yet. She had said to me, "A-wa-wa, wait 4or me, & tell Sister C & Bunny S to wait too, OK?" And I knew not what she speaked save the A-wa-wa part which is mah name in Miss Chris talk.

4or little guys, there was me & mah brother Alex & that nice green-eyed guy, Allie Leopard.

Crissy sat with Sheila in her throne after Sheila had a good laugh over Crissy's Beagle costume.

"LAUGH!" quoth Sheila, then she laughed quieter & made room. Mah silly Bumping brother climbed in too, cuz he does not have a healthy fear of fear. I think Allie would have climbed in too but he saw me settling alone on mah spot on the floor near the Throne & decided to join me.

We were just settled down when Algernon came into the Throne Room saying, "Hail & well met, chums!" And I was about to say, "Hi, fella!" when mah brainbone reminded me that I am Algernon!

"You're not me!" I jumped up & said.

Not-Algernon laughed a very familiar laugh. "A-wa-wa!" And then I knowed it was Miss Chris who was also wearing a Beagle costume.

"LAUGH!" yelled Sheila while Chrissy Beagle tumbled over to Miss Chris Beagle to hug her.

"Bump?" asked Alex, who stayed in the Throne.

"He says it's a bouquet of Beagles," said Allie next to me.

"It is not!" said me. But now Crissy Beagle & Miss Chris Beagle were both hugging me smiling. I tried to escape but I liked their hugs too much. Mushy hearted hug fiend, that's me.

"LAUGH!" said Sheila, looking at me & mah bouquet. I think I might have thought it was all funny too but at that moment the lights in the room dimmed & someone came through the door.

It was that silly Baby again, who calls herself Sargent Lisa Marie Chow. Holding up her green diaper, she said, "Pwesenting her woyal gweatness, Gweneral Bwetsy Bwunny Pwillow!"

O good grief & bad grief too!

Two rows of shadowy Allies marched in & stood on both sides of the door.

Betsy was a sight. She wore a purple cape around herself like a, um, a um, ut o!

"Who died & made you King?" demanded Sheila in her quiet dangerous paws-like-fists voice.

Betsy ignored Sheila & bounced slowly up to me & mah bouquet.

"There shall be no more kindnesses bestowed upon you, Beagle!" she whisperscreamed. I thinked hard if Betsy had ever bestowed a kindness on <u>anyone</u>!

"Should you place a thousand faux Beagles around you, I would still smother & smother to expose your scrawny hide!"

Betsy was crazy even with all the good big guys around! Doom!

I had decided to give mahself up be4ore the graves of the smothered began filling when the scene got stranger. Yah, that was possible still.

Through the door floated 3 Creatures who should have been the Blondys

but this time were Beagles! The last of the 3 yelled, "Yayy, Beagles!" & so I knowed that was Simi Bittersweet Beagle. Or something. Ask me a different question.

The Blondy Beagles floated near me & so now just about all the good big guys in Bags End were arrived.

I was probably the only one wondering if Betsy would fill the smothering graves still, but I was also less ready to give up on her.

All of mah bouquet surrounded me but said no words. Betsy looked so silly in her royal purple cape that I nearly laughed with fear.

I spoke up & listened to mah foolish hero's heart in amazement. "Now listen, Betsy, this is me the real Beagle here. I am not gonna write your lie-ography, & if you smother me, I really won't write it!"

Betsy listened with her no ears & mulled with her no face. "Then you lose, Beagle!"

"How?"

"Someone has to write about my exile from the Bunny Pillow Free State!"

Everybody was shocked!

"And someone must write about my glorious return to the seat of power!" Betsy crazed whisperscreamed.

O boy! There was more to all of this than I knowed.

Betsy left suddenly & mah bouquet took off their costumes. We didn't know what was going on, & none of us Pillows, but Betsy is one of our own when it comes down to it.

Huh?

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Betsy Bunny Pillow's New Exile!

So much for telling stories about things other than the exploits of big guys around Bags End. Yes, sir, it's time to get back to the usual business.

Well, sort of. I don't think this is the kind of story Betsy Bunny Pillow would prefer that I told on her.

It was too crazy, Dear Readers! Betsy Bunny Pillow has been exiled from the Bunny Pillow Free State which she helped to make! I was shocked & thought maybe it had to do with Farmer Jones, who used to run the Bunny Pillow Farm, growing Pillows & selling them to rich people.

Not so, friends. The story was slow in being told but what I figgered out was that the Bunny Pillow Free State was not nearly free enough 4or most of the Pillows who live there, & many of them thought it was Betsy who was making this happen.

It got tolded this time when a bunch of us were all kind of gathered in Sheila's Thone Room. Princess Crissy had come to Bags End on a visit, & Miss Chris had heared of her coming, & come too. So they were there, & I was there cuz I like to be where the action is, now that there was action.

Oh, & mah silly Bumping brother Alexander was there too, 4or he is popular with Miss Chris & Crissy, though I could not say why at all.

So we all gathered in a crowd around Betsy. Sheila was a little grumbly at not being King of her own room right now.

"Trouble down on the Farm, Pillow?" she gruttered.

Betsy leaped out of Miss Chris's skitching arms & tried to smother Sheila. Ha! The Pillow hasn't been builded who could smother that Bunny.

"We're not farmers!" she screamed. "And we don't need Jones coming back to help us do it or remember how!"

It was a fight for a minute & I was sure of mah unnoticed demise in it all, when suddenly Sheila was back in her Thone in Princess Crissy's lap with mah strange guileless brother Alex too, & Miss Chris was hugging Betsy tight with the Blondys hanging on too.

So we learned that the Bunny Pillow Free State was having trouble doing what it had done a lot when it was Farmer Jones's Bunny Pillow Farm. Grow Pillows, that is.

Betsy is no farmer, & she don't even like to think that Bunny Pillows only exist cuz Farmer Jones knowed how to grow them.

She was only worried about the next phase in the Permanent Evolution, whatever that is. Of course part of this involves those nice Face Pillows--

"Beagle! You heed me not!" whisperscreamed Betsy, as she tried to part me from mah breath.

Miss Chris rassled her away & we finally found about the part of the story about some renegade Pillows asking Farmer Jones to return & help them grow new ones.

"Never!" screamed Betsy & I thoughted she sounded more afraid than mad. "The criminal Jones will be smited 4or his sins! We shall smother & crush his bones!" she whisperscreamed some more, but I noticed she stayed tight in Miss Chris's arms this time, & when I added mah foolhardy huglove to hers & the Blondys I was allowed.

So Betsy had been told she had to stay in Bags End while her fellow Pilows learned from Farmer Jones how to grow new Pillows. This, of course, Betsy saw as her 4orever exile from her beloved homeland. Ha! thinked me secretly. Your real homeland is Bags End. The Bunny Pillow Free State for you is just a lot of guilt & puff.

"And what, Beagle?" Betsy whisperscreamed.

Did I talk out loud or can Betsy read thoughts? But Miss Chris was too busy pulling her crazy self off me that I forgot to ask.

So the strangeness of this story was that all the usual permanent Betsy crises were switched around. Farmer Jones was kind of the good guy & Betsy was kind of the bad guy tho not really. Umm.

I wondered what all the big guys would say now that we knowed the story.

Nobody said nothing 4or a minute. Then 2 & 3.

When it was up to 4, I thinked maybe I was deaf.

Finally I talked. "Betsy, don't you want new Pillows to grow?"

I cringed be4ore mah doom, but Betsy just said, "You don't understand, Beagle," in a sad whispery voice.

Well, this was all even stranger than usual. I wondered if I was in a fake Bags End or dream Bags End like I've been to be4ore.

"Understand what, Betsy?" trembly words talked from mah mouth. "Do you think Farmer Jones will try to trick his way in charge again?"

Betsy shook her no-head & sighed a unhappy whisper, which was even worse somehow. I figgered that we weren't gonna get no answer when Betsy suddenly talked.

"Jones didn't start the Farm. He stole it, & he drove out the original ones. I was trying to figure out how to find them & bring them back."

What?? said me in mah mind. Then I repeated like a old-time silent TV program. Haha.

"Betsy, who started the Farm?" asked Miss Chris sweetly.

"I don't know. But I remembered them in a dream I had. I heard about

them before I escaped," said Betsy.

I looked at Princess Crissy, who was thinking hard. "Crissy, do you know how we can find out?" I said, 4orgetting I am not a in charge guy who comes up with the plans.

Crissy smiled at me like she 4orgot too. "Maybe, Algernon. But do we want them or just what they know about growing Bunny Pillows? Betsy, what do you think?"

Betsy said nothing 4or a long time, then she talked. "Jones won't help us. He won't help us to be independent & he won't tell nobody about who he stole our home from."

Everyone was quiet now. I think big guys know about quiet better.

I talked again. "Sheila, what do you think?"

Sheila looked almost asleep but when I talked to her, her purple eyes were all over me. "I think we're all Betsy's friends, but she has to tell us how to help her. If she wants us to help her at all."

Betsy slipped from Miss Chris's lap, & left. Not madly but it was like the quiet be4ore. She needed to think her thoughts.

I left too but I said goodbye with hugs & kisses. I walked to Milne's Porch to mah comfy armchair, & took a nap.

When I woked up, I was snuggled by Miss Chris, Crissy, & mah brother Alex. The Blondys 3 were napping up above us in the air.

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Who Built the Bunny Pillow Farm?

It seems like all mah newspaper's life I have been writing about mah kinda friend Betsy Bunny Pillow & her exploits in her homeland called the Bunny Pillow Free State. It used to be Farmer Jones's Bunny Pillow Farm be4ore she liberated it to run it herself.

I thoughted that was the end of the story but I was wrong. Betsy is good as a dreamer of dreams, but she isn't very good at some other stuff.

First, along came the Face Pillows, which I writed about in mah It's OK to be Happy! Bags End Book, that Betsy would not have in the Bunny Pillow Free State, even tho they are some new kind of Pillow & very nice.

Then it turns out that Bunny Pillows don't know how to grow themselves. And Betsy told the big guys in Bags End, plus me & Alex & Allie Leopard that Farmer Jones had stealed the Bunny Pillow Farm Free State from somebody else.

Nobody knowed what to do, so 4or awhile nobody did nothing. The other Pillows were with Jones in the Bunny Pillow Free State learning how to grow Pillows, tho Betsy warned them of Jones's no good secret plans & talked loudly about her "exile" in Bags End.

I was kinda thinking maybe mah newspaper could not be about Betsy again 4or awhile. Ha! & double ha! Big guys love the big lights.

I was summoned by Betsy one otherwise peaceful & innocent day to her Secret Clubhouse.

One moment I was peaceful sleeping in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, & the next I was being handed from shadowy Ally to shadowy Ally, all the way to where that dum Pillow waited for me.

"Beagle," Betsy whispered, instead of hello, when the last of the Allys left me down on the Clubhouse floor. It wasn't such a bad ride really, cuz of a lot of the Allys like me, & gived me nice secret hugs along the way.

"Hello, Betsy," I said. "Why don't you never just come to see me or maybe

Bags End News
Double Issue!
No. 303-304 April 14-21, 2001
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Whoo Built the Buny Pillo Farmm?

Itt seemz lik awl mah nuwz papprz lif I hav bin riting about mah kinda frend Betsey Buny Pillo an her xxploits in herr homland shee kawlz thee Buny Pillo Freey Stat. Itt uzd too bee Farmr Jonses Buny Pillo Farmm befor shee liberatid itt too run itt herselt.

I thawted that waz thee end uff thee storey butt I waz rong. Betsee iz guud az a dreemr uf dreemz but she izent veree guud at sum uthr stuf.

Bags End News
No. 305 December 7, 2002
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Thee Grand ReeKonstruKshun Beggin!

Yor old pal Algernon haz beerd witnisss too menee a strang ivint in hiz dayz uf making mah lurkey nuwzpapr. But non uf them truley weerd az wen mah sortuf frend Betsee Buny Pillo kam um untas too fas with Farmr Jons her arch enimy an sortuf dadd.

Miss Chrees mah persunmomy told me that "Shee iz so madd bekuz he splantid her an awl uf her brothr an sistr an cuzzin pilloz but sold them too rich peepel.

Ar yu trikking mee with yer smart gerl brayn?" I sed dubelusley.

Mees Chrees laffd her wundrfull laff. "No, Awawa. Itz truu. Thee Arkitekts uf thee Buny Pillo Farm

Bags End News
No. 306 December 14, 2002
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Thee Grande ReKonstruKthun Kontinuz!

Yor olde pal Algernon keepss lerning howe figgering out whoo thee big guz & litel guys ar in thiz werld iz trikKyer thann it seemz. I gess itz lik a lott uf uthr thingz that shood bee 1+1=2 but or 3 or perpel or Z or somtims nott kwit both.

I jest triy too keep mah brain & mah pawbons kwit too thee reddy & no whoz mah frend. I waz standing 4or shur withe wun mah personmomy Mees Chrees inn wat habbitt inn mee stil cawls thee Buny Pillo Farmm az Betsee Buny Pillo & her kindrid pilloz wer werkin out thingz between themm. Evin thee litel pilloz woodent agreey with Betsee too anihilat Farmr Jonz.

send me a nice invitation?"

Betsy looked at me like I hadn't talked &, just as I was wondering if I had talked, she said, "Beagle, I have a report on the original Architects of the Bunny Pillow Free State."

Uht-o. Here was your old pal Algernon gonna get swallowed whole again into a big guy plan.

"So you're going to go see them, Betsy?" I said, using mah one poor trick with no hope.

Betsy kept talking like I didn't talk again. "We shall begin our pilgrimage in a day or so. You will document every step of the way, or I will bury you in your smothery demise." She looked at me quietly 4or just a second with her no-face, & then whisperordered, "Allys, remove this creature."

And so I was handed back from Ally to Ally until the last one, a little Ally, & a fan of Simmi Bittersweet the Baby Blondy cheerleader, gived me a little hug, & a little kiss, & said, "Yayy! Beagle!" & landed me safely in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch.

And so I was back where I started like nothing had happened except it all had.

"Grrr!" I said, tho in English, not Puppy language. "Dum big guys & their dum big guy schemes!"

I was getting madder & madder as I sat there, but what could I do? Betsy Bunny Pillow going to see the original Architects of the Bunny Pillow Farm?! Yes! I mean No! but Yes!

I have to admit to you, mah Dear Readers, that I love writing mah newspaper, & that what I yawp about is not good stories, but big guys who are not polite & treat me like I am their servant. Which I am not.

So I sitted thinking how to write mah story but not be bullied.

Big guys run things by making little guys afraid. They're loud & mean & dangerous when said no to. Many big guys have roughed up your old pal Algernon. So I go along not to get hurted. And to get mah story.

Then I thoughted about the other kind of big guy, like the Blondys 3 & Miss Chris & Princess Chrisakah. They don't hurt nobody, & nobody hurts them. And other big guys like them! How can that be?

I had no answers but I couldn't stop asking. If I know Betsy, this story won't be the last. It will keep starting up again, like a monster book that won't end but you can't stop reading. That's how Bags End is. It keeps mah newspaper interesting, so at least that's good.

But I had to wait till Betsy was ready, which annoyed me some. Only big guys clocks matter.

I decided to go visit mah good friend Princess Crissy in her Castle in Imagianna. Crissy is a magick girl & royal too, for real, not like Sheila who just decided one day she was. But Crissy don't act like a big shot at all. That's why she made a good Beagle which I have tolded about before.

"Algernon!" Crissy yelled all happy when she saw me politely waiting at her Castle's front door I knocked.

I looked around thinking some important guy had stolded mah name but Crissy was hugging me.

"Where's Boop, Crissy?" I asked. Boop looks like a turtle, but isn't one, & is Crissy's servant, tho she don't really treat him like that.

Crissy smiled pretty & tricky. "I made him go on vacation to see his brother."

"Brother?"

"His brother wrote him a letter saying come visit, so I royal ordered him to go!" Crissy said, & laughed, & hugged me more.

We took a walk, which we hardly ever do. I tolded Crissy mah thoughts on the two kinds of big guys. She listened closely.

"What about you, Algernon?"

"Me?"

Crissy nodded. "You're a big guy, but I don't think like either kind you described."

"I am not a big guy, Crissy!"

Crissy so smiled at me & I tried not to look behind me. "You're just a different kind."

"Which kind?"

"Well, you do your newspaper & many people read it. And we hear about Bags End by your thoughts."

Hmm. She had me there. "But I am little, Crissy. And the big guys like Betsy & Sheila don't treat me like one of their kind."

Crissy was quiet thinking. "You're bigger than Sheila."

"Ha!" I cried. "Nobody is bigger than her!"

"So being a big guy isn't about size?"

"Um. I don't know. Maybe it's more about the way someone acts."

"So it's in someone's mind?"

"I don't know, Crissy."

She laughed & tumbled me down a grassy hill. I guess it was OK not to know.

Later I asked her if anyone lived in Imagianna but her & Boop.

She looked sad. "I don't think so." Then she smiled. ""But I don't really know!"

"Hey! We could find out! You & me could go & find out!"

Crissy clapped her hands.

Then I said, "And then I could tell Betsy, sorry, pal, I am busy going somewhere I WANT to go this time!"

Crissy looked at me missing her smile now. "No, Algernon. You promised her."

Fooey. Yah, I did. "But we can go after!"

Then I had a great idea! "Crissy, you can come with us!"

She looked at me all eyes. "Me?"

I nodded.

Then she got shy. "But Betsy didn't ask me."

"Betsy didn't ask me neither, kid. She tolded me. And I will tell her that I want you to come.

Crissy hugged me.

"Plus, Crissy, she will feel even more of a big shot with you along."

Crissy laughed. I love her & Miss Chris's laughs.

Well, now I was liking this plan better than be4ore, but the funny thing happened next was when me & Crissy showed up hand in paw where Betsy ordered, she acted like Crissy was there by her bright idea!

She bowed a creepy Pillow bow & whispered, "Your Highness honors this lowly scribbling Creature by appearing with him."

"Hey!" I cried. "I am not lowly, I am just short. And I am a scribbling Creature but not how you said it, you, you, you PILLOW YOU!" Crissy had to hold me back from Betsy smothering me briefly.

Sheila was there too & wearing her crown that don't fit right but she thinks makes her look more jazzy, yah, whatever.

She hugged Crissy & ignored me. Boy! This was making me mad.

But then Miss Chris & the Blondys 3 lifted me in the air 4or hugs & I felt better, tho Beagles don't float & I didn't know Miss Chris did!

"I'm getting floating lessons, A-wa-wa!" she said excited & nice.

We were standing just inside a door of Bags End I had never been through be4ore, & it was a big field.

Betsy looked at me 4or the first time & said, "Getting there begins with starting from the right place. Make a note of that."

O great. The Pillow telling me her Wise Wisdoms. Crissy laughed quietly inside mah head to make me feel a little better.

"Who else is coming?" I asked to everyone, figuring most would ignore me, so why not try all.

Mah answer came when I heard the sound of marching feet & that silly bloo-eyed Baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow shouting orders.

"Hwup! 2! 3! 4! Hwup! 2! 3! 4!"

And her Army of the Babys which is usually just Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, but today was also mah silly brother Alexander Puppy & that nice green-eyed guy, Allie Leopard!

Lisa marched up to Sheila & Betsy & Miss Chris & Crissy & said, "Pwesenting mah twoops, Swers!"

Thn she saw me & said, "Hey! You dwaftdwodging bweaglefwace! Fall in line with the west of the twoops!"

"Do not heed that command, Beagleface!" Betsy whisperordered.

I laughed. "Haha, Lisa! Yes, Swer, Bwetsy, Swer! I mean, Betsy, Sir!"

Lisa looked like she was gonna cry, so Miss Chris & Crissy asked me nicely to march with the troops. They hugged & kissed a yes from me.

"Bump?" asked mah silly brother as I joined him in line.

"Alex says he always thought of you as the pacifist type. Have you changed?" said Allie.

"Ha!" yelled me. "Give Sleep a Chance!"

That woked up that Lazybug Ramie, & he hugged me & decided to carry me in his tall arms. Lisa protested, but Sheila told her to get marching.

So I had the best view of where we were going, & sometimes Ramie sleep-singed to me. Miss Chris was annoyed by his big sleep but she loves him so she did not stay made for too long.

Well, finally we set off in a sort of but not really line into the field ahead of us. I was glad 4or the many big guys among us.

Well, I was listening to Ramie sleep-sing as we marched, & pretty soon I closed mah eyes to listen bigger, & then I knew that Crissy was with me smiling her happy tricky smile while we listened, & I was sitting in her lap even though I wasn't, & she was petting mah fur but not that either.

Then Miss Chris was sitting with us, & that would have been strange enough, but she was with Ramie, & he was listening to Ramie sleep-sing, & now it was all way too weird 4or me to understand. But Ramie has a nice smile, & when he started singing in his mind with himself, I decided maybe I should just add mah cracked Beagle voice along. Crissy & Miss Chris added their nice voices to help out.

I figured the rest of the Bags End guys would join us soon, & they did, cuz Bags End guys know a good time if they smell it a thousand miles away.

Well, then something happened, & something happened next, which I suppose is how it could go when everyone crowds together inside someone's sleeping mind.

"I don't think we started from the right place, Betsy," I said, sleepy.

She agreed.

"And we can't start again in the same way."

She agreed too.

"And asking what do we do now isn't it either."

She waited.

"So what then?"

Suddenly, I was back in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, but I didn't know what had happened at all.

And Betsy Bunny Pillow was next to me.

I leaped from the armchair in case it was mah fault, whatever it was.

"Sit down, Beagle, you will be granted another worthless day," Betsy whispered but not even so very madly.

We were quiet & that was OK, I guess. Then Betsy talked.

"They won't see me."

"Who?"

"The Architects of the Bunny Pillow Free State. They told me my motives are selfish."

"When?"

"When all of you disappeared to hear that stupid toy sing!" Betsy was getting her smother up, & I was getting ready to run.

But she got quiet again, so I didn't run.

"They said I have to make peace with Farmer Jones, & let him help us."

"Are you gonna?" I asked.

Betsy sighed sadly. "I will sacrifice as I must."

Well, I didn't know what she meant really, but I figgered I would be smart to keep mum & save mah worthless hide. I mean, um. Yah.

Betsy suddenly bounced through mah bedroom window back into Bags End. I didn't know if she was gonna go see Jones right way or not, but I didn't care. Not yet anyway.

Weird though that Betsy has to be good now about Farmer Jones. Being good in Bags End is a accident most of the time.

Nothing much happened for a few days until one day I was napping with Miss Chris on her Suzy Couch & Betsy came bouncing in. Miss Chris woked up & said, "It's time 4or us to go with Betsy, A-wa-wa."

"Go where?" I asked, flexing mah paws secretly in case running was the best idea.

"To begin the Grand Reconstruction, you stupid mongrel!" whisperscreamed Betsy like her usual belligerent self.

"Betsy is going to meet Farmer Jones, & she needs me to keep her from smothering left & right, & she needs you to write the story about it," said Miss Chris, her smile charming me till I 4orgot to remember to protest.

So we went the three of us back to Bags End, & then to the right level, & the right door to the Bunny Pillow Free State.

I truly did not know what was going to happen.

Happiness? Cooperation? Yah, right.

******

The Grand Reconstruction Begins!

Your old pal Algernon has beared witness to many a strange event in his days of making mah lovely newspaper. But none of them truly weird as when mah sort of friend Betsy Bunny Pillow came, um, un-face to face with Farmer Jones her arch-enemy & maker.

Miss Chris explained it to me more. "The Architects of the Bunny Pillow Farm know she & Farmer Jones have to make up to make things good again."

"Good again?" I cried. "But it wasn't good first! Don't you remember how

she runned away from the Bunny Pillow Farm the night be4ore she was gonna get picked & sold to rich people? And then she led the revolution to free the Bunny Pillows & made up the Bunny Pillow Free State when they got kicked out?"

"And why didn't that work, A-wa-wa?"

Hmm. "Because the Bunny Pillows don't know how to grow themselves!"

"That's right! They need him!"

Well, I didn't even know what to say to that. Then Betsy appeared to us all fluffy & scary. Um, yah, really.

"Beagle, I warned you about your disruptive ways!" she said, half crazy. The other half was too busy thinking about trying to talk to Farmer Jones & not fight him.

Miss Chris saved me from cease by giving Betsy a really good hug.

I waited & tried not to be too jealous that some guys gets hugs just too quiet their meanness.

It was a long walk to the Bunny Pillow Free State. It's never the same route there whenever we go from Bags End. Fantasylands can be tricky that way.

Miss Chris singed sometimes as we went. I think her songs changed as where we were changed. As we climbed a grass field to the green sky, she sang like a flute, & I felt like each step we took was closer to some better answer or more interesting question.

When we slowly swooped into a dark valley of rocks & bullying wind, her singing jumped up & down like being chased by a thing in the shadows. I was glad to be with the big guys then.

The last part of our journey took us through a forest I sort of remembered but it was bigger this time, & the trees talked.

Well, they talked to me & Miss Chris. We were sitting in a cleared space & gonna sleep, but Betsy was off somewhere else brooding or scheming or something.

I was sitting on Miss Chris's lap & she was petting my fur & we weren't asleep yet when I heard them.

"She has bad ideas in mind," they said. "She thinks she can trick Farmer Jones into teaching her how to grow Bunny Pillows & then expel him again. She believes she is doing this to save her people from him. It won't be easy to convince her that Farmer Jones used to be someone else, & he is needed."

I didn't say nothing out loud & I wasn't even sure that it was the trees who talked or that spooky inside-my-mind kind. Or even that Miss Chris had heard too, tho I was pretty sure she did.

"So what do we do?" Miss Chris asked, or maybe I did, or us both, don't know. Things are stranger than they used to be.

"Be ready when the time comes to say no to Betsy. It will be hard. Everything depends on it."

O that's all. I would have thinked some scared thoughts & some more, but I fell asleep, & Miss Chris too, & then it was daytime, & Betsy was back & threatening mah prompt downfall if we didn't go NOW! We went.

Me & Miss Chris didn't talk about what the trees said but we both knew all about the no we had to say when the time came.

The fields of the Bunny Pillow Free State were empty. I had never seen them like that be4ore. Nothing growing in the blue & pink ground. No new Pillows growing. I think three of us got a little upset seeing this.

It was a long way through the fields till we got close to the Farmhouse. Then we saw Pillows coming to us.

Not all Pillows look like Betsy, who is sort of rectangle-shaped & much bigger than your old pal Algernon. They are different shapes & sizes & wear different clothes than Betsy's blue dress with bunnies all over it.

I guess really all of them aren't real Bunny Pillows even. It was Betsy's thinking that called this place the Bunny Pillow Farm & Bunny Pillow Free State.

A small black velvety Pillow came up to Betsy out of the crowd.

"Blessings, our Pillow. We receive your arrival with smiling hopes." This Pillow whispered like Betsy, so that much was true still.

"Where is Jones?" demanded Betsy. The Pillows, big & small, round & not, velvet, satin, & cotton, all bounced a step back at this command.

A very long thin yellow Pillow said, "We remind our Pillow that she no longer rules the Farm, nor does the Farmer. Soon we will again be a Great Collective."

Betsy huffed up her chest. Uh-oh. "You will soon be again a collection of slaves to Jones & his customers!"

Miss Chris stepped 4orward & smiling said, "Betsy is worried that Farmer Jones wants to carry on his old ways."

Two pink & white oval Pillow twins said together, "The Farmer won't cause any more hurt. The olden ways are renewing."

"The fields are empty!" Betsy whisperscreamed. "We will not negotiate with Jones the terms of surrender or annihilation! He will grow free Pillows again or face my smothery wrath!"

The Pillows had surrounded us but I don't think unfriendly. But crazy Betsy was ready to fight them all to save them. Um, or something.

The black velvet Pillow talked again. "Our Pillow must meet the Farmer in good hope & truth."

Betsy turned to us or really Miss Chris. "We need to capture Jones & make him to tell us how to grow Pillows. If he doesn't, I will smite him good!"

Miss Chris was not smiling when she quietly said, "No, Betsy."

I think Betsy was so surprised she 4orgot mah insignificance & turned to me. "Well, Beagle?"

I tried to be smart like the trees & brave like Miss Chris but all that came out of mah mouth was "woof!"

I guess woof means no at least sometimes cuz Betsy bounced toward me with smothering on her mind, & only Miss Chris catching her kept me from being all done.

It took a long time to calm her down. Even when she was calm I still felt like she could have smothered everyone in sight briefly. I sort of admire Betsy 4or never backing down to anyone. Strange but yes.

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The Grand Reconstruction Continues!

Your old pal Algernon keeps learning how figgering out who the big guys & little guys are in this world is trickier than it seems. I guess it's like a lot of other things that should be 1+1=2 but are 3 or purple or Z or sometimes not quite both.

I just try to keep mah brainbone & mah pawbones quick to the ready & know who's mah friend. I was standing 4or sure with mah friend Miss Chris in what habit in me still calls the Bunny Pillow Farm, & her kindred Pillows were working out things between them. Even the little Pillows wouldn't agree with Betsy to annihilate Farmer Jones.

Betsy remembers way too good how she barely escaped being picked by Farmer Jones & sold to rich people, her life over, just a thing & nothing else. She ran, & Miss Chris saved her, & Bags End became her sanctuary. She fighted to free her homeland, only to succeed, then fail. I felt kind of bad 4or her inside mah terror.

I kept thinking one then another Pillow was the Bunny Pillow Farm big guy, but it wasn't like that. They took turns talking to Betsy, which is not what she is used to. They kept using the words in old ways.

I timidly asked, "Um, Pillows, mah name is Algernon Beagle, & I write a newspaper called Bags End News. I was wondering, what are the old ways?"

I thought Betsy might try to get me good, but she held her place & listened too. I don't think she knowed anymore than me.

A Pillow that had no one shape or color, but was like a blobby Water Pillow, singed, "It was when we all knew what to do."

"O," quoth I.

"And soon we will again," sang many of the Pillows, happy.

Hmm. I could see more & more why Betsy didn't like what was going on. In Bags End, the big guys bully & brash around & only other big guys keep them in check, sort of. Betsy is way more Bagzinian bully than she is Bunny Pillow Farm cooperating.

Suddenly, Betsy broke free from Miss Chris's arms & flew toward me with a smother-the-Beagle-right-this-time whisperscream. I was far too slow to escape, & figgered I was finally done. I closed mah eyes & felt mahself rising to the stars. Goodbye, grumpy world.

Except, if you're smothered, you can't breathe, & I could. I opened mah deceased eyes & I was not under one crazed Pillow, but lightly on top of many nice Pillows. They were under & around me & Betsy could not get to me. I would write down all her threats, but I was too scared to remember them.

I was figgering all this was hopeless when a tall figure walked up. He had a straw hat on that covered his face, but I could tell by the rest of his clothes that he was Farmer Jones!

The Pillows beneath me left quickly, but not so that I fell down hurted. Miss Chris holded me & watched the next weird doing.

Farmer Jones is a very tall guy, like Miss Chris's toy tall boy brother Ramie. Betsy charged him, but Pillows kept bouncing between them to thwart her. He kept walking up to us, & Betsy never really got near to him.

Finally, some of the Pillows surrounded Betsy like walls & a roof. It wasn't a cage, but she could not get at Jones. She whisperscreamed till she was exhausted, & then got quiet. Miss Chris was allowed to sit with her & hold her. I stayed put waiting.

Farmer Jones didn't say nothing 4or a long time. I kept thinking that he would. Betsy did too, cuz the fight in her was ready at the first cruel word.

But nothing, & then some more. Then he nodded & turned & walked toward the Pillow fields &, not knowing what else to do, we all followed.

"What's going on here?" I asked Miss Chris.

"I think it's time to learn how to grow Pillows," she said.

There was a big red barn we came to. Tho nobody said anything, only Farmer Jones went in.

Then the Pillows began to sing!

Pillows are made of sunshine & soil!
Pillows are made of green magick & fluff!
Pillows are made from the best kind of stuff!

Sometimes they sang it faster, sometimes more loudly, but those were the words over & over, & me & Miss Chris joined in too. I don't know if Betsy did. She was near the barn door the whole time, expecting tricks & traps.

But all that happened was that Farmer Jones came out with heavy bags of something, & with no words led us to the Pillow fields.

OK, now it got stranger. The Pillows got talky & explained that the old ways involved growing Pillows from the 6 natural elements. Earth was the field of dirt. OK, fine. Air was the fluff in Farmer Jones's bag. And a bit of fluff from every Pillow. Whoa.

It involved a small tear in each Pillow & sewing up the tear after. I thought Betsy would have a heart attack. Then a Pillow like a green bush explained.

"This way the Pillows don't get stiff & talkless when they're picked. Jones has renounced his ways & agreed to grow Pillows free to live & choose their own lives."

Betsy said nothing as much as Jones when he took a little fluff from her & sewed her back up.

Water would come when it rained, so that one was easy.

Then the Pillows led us away from the fields, & Farmer Jones seeded it with new fluff & old. It took a long time, cuz he went very slowly & carefully.

When he set the fields on fire, I thought Betsy would scream louder with fear than me. But the other Pillows watched quietly & happily. The rain came like someone had called it. Now I got it.

The 5th element I was told was spirit, & that involved all of us blowing the rainy smoke out of the fields.

"We animate our forthcoming brothers & sisters with the stuff of our own lives," said a small bouncy little Pillow. Stuff & fluff. But more.

"Magic, A-wa-wa," Miss Chris smiled at me. "Or Art maybe. The word in Pillow is shifty." She was happy & huggy & I was long past understanding it. If someone asked me about it all, I would say, "Stuff & fluff, pal."

Then Betsy & the other Pillows were gone with the 6th element. Me & Miss Chris were walking back to Bags End past the smoking fields. And, um, hmmming.

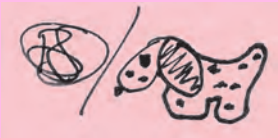
"Is Betsy gone? Are she & Farmer Jones friends now?"

Miss Chris was as quiet as the talkless Jones. "I don't think so, A-wa-wa. She never sits still long."

So the Bunny Pillow Farm or Pillow Farm is, I think, growing Pillows again in the older weirdo ways. I think that's good, but I don't really know what to think, really.

I leave this story to end on the way back to Bags End with Miss Chris.

Love,
A. Beagle



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Charlie Beyer

Sapphire Sins

[Travel Journal]

xxxv. Wounds

June 23rd. Bacon in the morning. The day starts at 40 degrees at 6, same as these other warm days, and then 70 by noon. We debate what we've done. Diego wants to continue at this spot as we have it washed down, but still there is 2 feet of overburden to plow through, to fling to the waste heap. We all go at it with the hose again. We work 2 two-hour sessions and melt away 6 or more cubic yards. About a foot over bedrock now. We quit about 7 PM, having shoveled no pay dirt for the day. We're all burnt out and very sore.

Diego has a golfball-sized bump on his neck. Don't know if he came with this disability, or his bones got tweaked, working like a rented mule to bring down all these supplies. Hurts him like crazy. It looks like a slipped disk. Hope it doesn't paralyze him out here. I have 5 bottles of codeine, 5% dope with acetaminophen, one-third gram. This is the script the dentist handed out after every visit as he ripped out another half dozen teeth. I didn't really need the stuff for a pulled tooth or two—I have a reasonably high pain threshold—and it's not as bad as a mangled finger. Thus I amassed the scripts for a few dozen yanked Chiclets.

But we need the shit now. Diego chomps 3 in the morning, I scarf 2, Terry's feeling a little sore, so 2 are good for her also. The dogs could probably use some too but, because we're good parents, we don't give them any. Cat seems in good form though. We still some 60 pills left. We'll be eating them by the handful soon. It does kill the sharp pain and makes ya a little happy. Nothing wrong with happy.

We are too tired to continue with the hole today. The 6 cubic yards have kicked our butts. Tomorrow we'll take it all down past this level and into bedrock. A 9 x 6 hole size, minimum. 54 square feet that, at 10 carats to the square foot, should equal 540 carats. If we get half, 270 carats at 5 carats a square foot, then I'll be a stupid happy camper.

In the evening, Diego works on his foundry action with fresh enthusiasm. I wish he would show this much fire in the sapphire hole. I calculate that we need a blower, so Diego fetches a pipe. He puts that in the coals, blowing on the melted cans. But blowing through the pipe is only good for a lungful. I find a huge garbage bag that, when held tight over the pipe end, with the fat bag of air being squished, a good minute of pipe-blown air blasts the can and coals, making an environment well over 1000 degrees.

Tonight he melts three-quarters of a bean can of aluminum. The mold is ready. The kid wants to make a tomahawk, but only produces a square like a chocolate bar. We puddle the molten metal, but the pipe stabs a hole in the can and all the aluminum leaks into a puddle in the bottom of the fire once again.

I get him all hyped up about all the bronze hose couplings laying around. The miners 20 years ago left a dozen fire hoses rotting on the ground that we collect. The ends of these hoses are bronze fittings. Diego gets a fitting into the best steel can and goes about his alchemy. Loads the fire with a dozen chunks of wood with the can inside. Then he sets to work with the blower bag. After an hour, we pull it out. It's still a brass fitting. No meltage. Diego hammers on the fitting on a rock for a half hour, as if to assist in its melting. Not sure what was intended.

xxxvi. Sullen

June 24th. Dig and dig the hole. Clean 8 square feet, which should have at least 40 carats in it, but only has 20. Half the grade. Bummer. Diego is very grumpy and silent, excepting for a few snarky comments and surly statements. OK, yeah. Sure the work is bone-breaking hard, but an attitude solves nothing. When the evening comes, he is sullen and glum. He announces that he's leaving in the morning with no extra words or explanation.

xxxvii. Note on a Card on the Red Chair

June 25th. I'm awakened to see Diego in a full pack, preparing to go up the hill.

"Are ya leaving?" I ask. No goodbye. *No good morning.*

"First load," he says flatly. *No notification.*

"I'll be back for the tent," he says.

I stagger around the campfire. No breakfast. Diego returns in an hour and a half. Since we've all planned to go to town today, I head up the hill myself an hour before the others. The hike is bad on my aged body, but not as bad as it has been. Though exhausted, my body is getting stronger.

I reach the top at the same time as Diego and Terry coming up from behind. We fuss and organize a little, and say goodbyes to the kid.

There is a note on a card on the red chair, here in upper camp. The note is from the worm, Steve Kelly, the Forest Service guy. The little prick has driven all the way up here to scold me about something. The note says to call him and discuss my mining. Well—*what the fuck does he know about that?*

He didn't hike down, to my great relief, but if the asshole is this close, what's to prevent him from doing so in the future? Probably with some other pencil dick, trying to make a name for themselves by screwing over an honest miner.

I am *not* calling the bureaucrat turd. *Fuck the card.* What I *am* going to do is cover my tracks. Get all the power equipment outta there. Then there is no case. We can truthfully say we are just using hand methods and panning, as is our right under the 1872 mining laws.

We go to town, meeting Diego there as he pulls into the restaurant/bar/store. Breakfast of burgers because we're too late for the egg mess. Then we part ways. Terry and I do the $120 grocery thing. Then back to the hill.

My body is mega-exhausted. It may be the *Checkers* cigarettes I bought. Taste rather like the Sunday newspaper section was boiled and rolled into these nasty cheroots. Each one puts me into a near-dead-weight paralysis. Can hardly move, only gasp for breath. But I keep smoking them to quell the blanket of overwhelming terror I have of the future.

Back at the upper camp, we pack everything into and onto things with wheels, and then head down. Two long stops, but it takes only a little over an hour. Camp looks like Paradise. It's 80 and hot. We are drenched in sweat. Cat is on her perch, smiling. We strip and wash soapy in the ice cold pond. It's hot out, but the water is so cold that head dunking is a 10-second operation. Our feet are totally frostbitten underwater. We make love in the tent, all naked and fresh, our sounds of joy no longer overheard by the kid. The day is spent in sleep and recuperation.

But I am stressed, restless, and fidgety. Now the government a-holes are hunting me for violations. I feel horribly violated. Like when the robbers break in and make a video of shoving your toothbrush up their asses, then post it on YouTube. They piss in your orange juice and feed the cat rat killer. All this is disgusting, horrible, and deceitful.

I feel these despicable acts have happened to me and the criminals are still in the house, wiping their asses with the curtains. I can feel their sneaky ways intertwining with my life, the life of an old man who wants a tiny mine to supplement his life. Who wants to realize a dream. Who wants to have

a nice claim where mining can be pursued without dickwads worming into his business and destroying his life. There's no skin off of their own asses.

I feel raped. I am sufficiently fornicated with Terry, but raped by what I can feel is lurking out there.

xxxvii. Doom

June 26rd. We wake refreshed. Though still feeling like our bodies have been on the rack. But my muscles are building and tuning up, tightening up for the better. In fact, I feel stronger and more alive than ever. I throw the last of the *Checkers* in the fire. Those butts are some kind of certified death. Should be an additional warning on those: *Torpidity and toxicity will kill you by the end of this pack*.

Pomo the cat climbs the tree. New habitat. Horse flies abound in the morning heat, seeking an open spot to sink their teeth in. The government and the flies.

I have a vague feeling of doom. A very strong vague feeling. I can feel these bureaucrats churning in the distance, loading their battle wagons, thumping drums for imagined heinous environmental infractions. I can almost smell the pigs. Because of these nebulous visions, Terry and I pull all the hoses out of the mine area and hide them in the woods. Terry shovels a little pay dirt into the sluice box and I applaud her moxie to get the treasure. I flop around trying to get my grubby mining pants on. So I can join her industry.

Then the dreaded disaster occurs. The tsunami of bureaucracy. The dogs erupt in barking. Terry runs up to camp and stops the two pedestrians that have hiked down the hill. I finally get my pants and belt on, and come up to camp. I was hoping it was pizza boy with some pies, but quickly realize it's the long arm of the law. *The pooooliecccc*e.

One smiley checkered shirt guy announces he is Steve, the Forest Service dick who has come down here to analyze my violations. The other is a FS "law enforcement officer." He's suited up for guerilla action, with a bullet-proof vest, a huge pistol brimming with bullets like spider eggs, and a running camera on his chest.

Everything I say must be the minimum. Nothing is more. But I can't help but say, "Why did you think you had to bring this Gestapo officer with you? Do I look dangerous?"

"Oh it's just company policy. He hikes in everywhere with me,"the Steve worm tries to excuse the death dispenser among us.

"I'm the Law Enforcement Officer" is all the killing machine says.

I'd like to perforate this pig and the worm, and then plant them in the tailings pond, but by the time I get out the rifle, this trigger-happy Mr. Smith would have me looking like a western road sign. A cheese-grater. Mr. Bulletproof has his hand on the trigger strap to the pistol, ready to draw down. I'm half-naked with a dull hunting knife. No match. He's probably trained in 8 forms of jiu-jit su, where as I could hardly walk up from the mine. The pig is absolutely expressionless, scanning everything with his beady unblinking eyes, intent to find violations. His GoPro records everything as some small talk proceeds. *Who am you? How long have you been here? We want to see the mine! Will you show us?*

As if this is a question I can refuse with Captain Glock 99 eyeing us like a glacier, cleaning his thumb nail on the pistol's trigger. Showing the mine is like willingly walking up to the firing squad wall. I could run—but I can also feel the 9mm bullet lodged between the 3rd and 4th lumbar vertebrae. Sheepishly, I take them down to the mine. They do lots of gasps and head shaking, as though walking for the first time into the Auschwitz concentration camp.

The mine hole is 20 by 10 feet in size, down to rock. Stumps and chopped trees are in a truck-sized pile behind us. Steve is wagging his head in disbelief and snapping dozens and dozens of digital pictures. I wonder which one will be the background for my wanted poster? I hope they use that cool western font and make the price on my head in huge tall numbers.

But shit! We didn't get the pumps moved. But at least every trace of hose is gone, even the intakes

Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

on the pumps, all hidden in the woods. "All this was done with a pick and shovel, all by hand," I say. "We brought down the pump for the dry season, but haven't used it." All lies, of course.

They are not smart enough to identify the difference between being washed away or dug away; all the flow lines in the dirt are still there. To me it's obvious.

There are no piles of topsoil or the "B" layer of barren dirt heaped up anywhere. It's all been blasted away with the high-pressure hose. The topsoil is lost into a soup of unusable bio garbage. But without the visible hoses—a GoPro recording, or camera proof—there is no way to prove that the hole wasn't dug by hand. My word against theirs, as if that's worth a shit.

"So where did you graduate, and in what subject, Steve?" I ask.

"I have a degree in Forestry from the University of Missoula," he proudly announces. So it is exactly like I figured. This privileged prick has a woodsy green degree paid for by Mama and he doesn't know the first thing about mining. He's been bumped up in the office as the old timers—who did work with miners—retire. Now Steve is the lord of stopping all mining, which he exercises abundantly to cover his stupidity of the subject.

"I was just mining like the old timers, with the flume boxes. That's all I am really, just an old guy looking for a retirement fund that I can dig by hand under the 1872 mining laws."

"But Montgomery Gulch has been closed by the Fish and Wildlife Agency to protect the Bull Trout," Steve announces with pride.

"The fish here would have to climb a 15 foot waterfall, which is dry, and continue up a dry gulch for a mile to get to here. Where is the map of the zoning and the report clarifying its reasons? I want a copy of the report, the peer review, and the authorizing scientist that verified these conclusions. Only an idiot would designate an inaccessible dry gulch as fish habitat."

The fuck says nothing, and the impeccable pig is particularly silent.

We hike quietly back to camp, but the pig notices the tree house way up on the hill. I have to tear that down, he says. I have to tear down everything I've built. Back at camp, the pig goes into a full grilling. *How long this? How long that? What is my phone number, email, address, mother's maiden name?*

Steve has to chime in with my violation of historical "resources." I have neglected an analysis by the Historical Society. Apparently these 20-year-old tailing piles from the previous guy are now historic, and I've disturbed them. I have also not done an endangered environmental study, both for tiny unseen plants, but also there may be a new species of grizzly bear down here, or maybe a new type of biting fly.

Surely there must be some endangered bacteria somewhere about here. It would be horrible to damage 80 square feet of their habitat.

Of course the dry stream-bed is habitat for these invisible fish, so that right there says "no fucking way." But a hydrologic study is necessary for the remote possibility of drilling a well (that a permit cannot be gotten for). Building any structures in the forest is a massive violation in which all carpentry creations need to be burned.

In the end of this onslaught of pig pressure, the "Officer" has some additional information if we were to camp here, which we are currently not allowed. Every scrap of food, cooked or uncooked, along with every fork, spatula, stove, fry-pan, etc.—all the things in a kitchen—needs to be suspended 30 feet off the ground every night. The huge bundle also has to be 50 feet from any nearest tree.

So a massive network of cables, tables, and nets all has to be built and suspended in space. The elaborate construction is to be in accordance with the new bear regulations. *Wouldn't want to violate the bear regulations*. But, of course, I'm not only evicted, but not allowed to build anything.

I've been sitting on this stump for an hour being lambasted for my crimes. I've smoked 4 cigarettes. My ass is sore. I've volunteered no information, but answered mostly truthfully. Finally they run out of questions, and shuffle their feet in the dirt.

Stupid Steve says he'll bring all this information back to his supervisor, the big chief, and be

back in two days with his declaration. He says it will not be good. A stop work and eviction notice at a minimum. Like I am so surprised.

The pig bastards finally leave—no handshakes. *Why would I shake the hand of my executioner?*

We are depressed considerably on the departure of the vermin. We climb the nearby hill and tear apart the tree house. It's a rote dumb job, good for a stunned mind, but so sad to tear down one's dreams, dreams of sexy nights under the stars. A vision of naked women squirming all over me. Gone. The tree house is a wonder of structural engineering construction, never to be slept in, a blip in biologic time. *How dare the pigs steal that from me*? My dreams of an aerial threesome.

Later, because we're all set up, and in spite of the bastards, we dig a pile of pay dirt. This captures a big and brilliant blue sapphire of 2 carats. *Hah!* I think. I'm closed down but I got to steal this one last beauty. In my softened mind, I win. I got some jewels and lived the life of the 1880s miner.

But, still, underneath my feet, a few feet down, lays a carpet of gems worth millions. It is with lead shoes that I must walk away from this. A heart as heavy as stone.

xxxviii. Just Need a Fucking ATV

June 27th. We sleep fitfully. Wake up depressed. Don't want to wake up. The question is: *how to get a ton of crap up a 1200 feet elevation and a mile of trail?* Up out of this hole in the wilderness. I can hike it up. Even push a load. But twice in a day will practically kill me. Even at that rate it would take us two weeks.

We resolve to go to town and hire an ATV or rent one. The usual slog up the hill with computers, phones, wallets, keys, the things that define civilization in these days. A little less than an hour climb. *Getting stronger, but to what use now?*

An hour rattling down the road off the mountain in the truck. The cat is left behind, but the dogs are crammed into the cab with us. In town, Terry strikes a deal with a fry cook behind the restaurant while I smoke in despair in the truck. Terry's deal with the young pimply kid is $400 to haul everything out to the truck at the top of the hill.

He has a friend with a mother who has an ATV. He's all happy to do it after 2:30, when he gets off from washing dishes at the greasy spoon. OK. The deal is a go.

We wait for two hours, half sleeping on a tiny patch of grass in the shade. 2:30 comes, and no kid. We call. The kid's friend fell through. His mother will not lend the friend the ATV. Thinks he's reckless and he's grounded anyway for smoking cigarettes. The dishwasher is working on finding another ride. We're even more depressed now. Back to square one.

Need an ATV and an operator. The ATV store will not rent. They say nobody rents due to insurance liability bullshit. No insurance, no liability. Nothing. *No way.* The modern way to blow off just about anything interesting or mildly dangerous. The new chicken shit society.

So what to do? Go to the bars? We know we'll get dirt bags there. We were hopeful to get the kid who knows nothing of life but work, clear blue eyes that can see elk 2 miles off in a meadow, French fry pimples, a *Playboy* picture in his wallet, a work ethic going back to the covered-wagon days.

We stop at a few houses with ATVs out front and try to hire them, but with no luck. Terry goes into the hardware store where she meets the mayor of town, in dirty jeans and sporting a 7-pound beard. He knows a guy, maybe, if we can wake him up. Otherwise he knows another guy who knows a guy. We call the guy. You can smell the alcoholic stupor through the phone. Sure, he'll do it, just give him a minute to find his teeth, and get his blood stream back up to a 4.8. He'll meet us at the grocery store in a half an hour after he gets the gizmo from his girlfriend.

The day is dribbling away. We wait at the grocery store. Suddenly, the dishwasher kid shows up on an ATV. He's gotten the machine from his grandmother. For effect, he spins around the truck twice. It would seem that the women own all the ATVs in this town.

Grandma is like 36. The kid is 16 and proud of it. This demonstrates the breeding power of long

winters in these mountain villages. Isolated, uneducated, unemployed, unable to see beyond the walls of their valley, there is nothing else to do except screw. The poor people's entertainment. By January it's an orgy of rabbits in every bar and church.

This kid has 3 fathers and 2 mothers. *So is the sperm additive? One giving brown hair and the other orthogonal ears to catch distant moose calls? How do two mothers give birth to the same child? Is this a paperwork thing for welfare, or does each have half and the parts are assembled by midwives?* The kid looks like he's been assembled out of a Mr. Potato Head toy.

Terry has been a god-saver with her energy. I'm a total wimp. She's the one who has been haranguing the populace with entreaties for the haul job. I don't feel I can talk to anyone. Terry is scouring the town for broke derelicts and I can't even move from the overwhelming depression. And it's nice work she does. I never did any better hustling somebody as a teenager to buy me a bottle of 151 rum in front of the liquor store. Thanks for that, Terry, you are a savior and brilliant spirit. Have a shot from the bottle.

We load the ATV in the truck after mucking out a pile of boxes and unused tools. The kid is fast and enthusiastic. Terry calls the drunk, who is late anyway, unable to find his teeth after last night's revelry. She cancels the contract previously made on the phone. He is sorry to lose the money, but relieved he doesn't have to do any actual work. We gotta go with the kid. He's here and roaring like a lion.

With the kid (named Wyette), two dogs, Terry and me, and the ATV loaded in the back, we all drive up the mountain, crammed in the truck cab. Arriving 4:30ish in the afternoon, we set in breaking camp apart down at the mine. We tie huge unbalanced loads on the ATV, storage bins, rolls of hose, engines, tool handles sticking out in all directions, an unstable, heavily lashed jumble.

The kid teeters away with each load, up the extreme hill of 1200 feet, in a consistent but careful way. He has a few minor crashes on the 20-degree hill, with crap flying off like huge butterflies, then needing to be retied. I give the kid my knife to slash the ropes on the loads when he reaches the top, rather than take the time to untie. I'm left at the bottom to tie up loads. Even the cat gets a ride up in an early load.

When the ATV goes up with a load, it's 45 minutes until it returns. I'm alone. It's getting dark deep in this canyon. The mosquitoes are crazy, the air feels ice cold. I am overwhelmed with loneliness, despair, depression, darkness as I survey the wreckage of my dream. Now disappearing, heap by heap, back to the barren condition of cold naked forest floor. All homeyness torn down. No more cat perch in the center of camp. The mixed heaps are looking like an impossible and an interminable task to get all this shit outta here.

Then the ATV returns, the kid all blazing pink and red with chilled baby fat, ties up anything that will fit, then he tears off up the hill again, load after load. My lonely frozen condition turns to fear as blackness envelops the stark camp. If the ATV breaks down, I'm on my own in this desperate hell. Bears and the Wendigo and all that.

Finally, at midnight, we have it all up on the top. Pay the kid, and have to count his money for him. Load the ATV back in the truck and an hour drive back to town. As we unload the ATV on a grassy knoll next to the ATV dealer, two police squad cars pull up. The officers are in checkered shirts, various home grown armaments, a police hat on one and a cowboy hat on the top dog.

We are accused of stealing the ATV. We are actually trying to unload it, but the tailgate is stuck. I conscript the bigger flat top pig boy to help me jack the tailgate open. King Hat is in a frenzy to find the serial numbers of the machine so he can prove our theft. But the numbers are never found with a careful flashlight search.

Wyette seems to know these goons. He also knows the 3 checkered shirt rednecks along for the ride in the police car, probably smoking dope and snorting white powder as they troll for crime. King Hat seems to know Wyette also.

Eventually, the "police" lose interest and can find no blatant felony. King Hat is trying to date

Wyette's grandmother through *OurTime.Com* during off hours. Since Grandma is the ATV owner, he doesn't want to threaten his romantically inclined intentions by arresting the grandson.

We get the tailgate loose, unload the ATV, and the pigs wander back to their cars, somewhat defeated by not having someone to haul to the jail where they can drink coffee till dawn. Wyette leaps on the machine and zooms up Main Street, disappearing into the night.

I return to the mountain through the black air, happy to not be incarcerated. I feel that all these other government agencies have the first right to that. Back at the upper camp, where Terry and the animal menagerie wait, our crap strewn everywhere, I am home with my tiny tribe. It's 3 AM, but I can't sleep. I writhe in the blankets all night. Pomo sleeps soundly in the truck.

xxxviii. El Dorado

June 28th. We wake but are still exhausted. We toke a little, then crash out again. Around 11, we hear a truck coming. Drives right up to our heap, but it can't pass through the scattered mounds. The dogs go into a barking lather. It's Steve, the Forest Service a-hole. He is very amazed at our work to bring it all to the top.

"There is not a paperclip left down there." I tell him. Which is another lie, having left the iron sluice and various other oversized tools. But hidden.

He presents me with the official letter from the FS director, the chief King Kong of their scurrilous regulators. The letter says what I expected. *Stop everything. Reclaim. Clear out every trace.*

I believe we did this, so hardly read the letter. Just stuff it in my jacket. *Where's the teeth? Where's the fines? Where's the pistol pig?* There are no government threats for non-compliance and, besides, we did everything on the list. So screw these rubber-toothed tigers, unable to hold their threats against an innocent citizen.

We convince the running dog Steve that all is copasetic down at the mine. Things there are covered in topsoil, historical artifacts are all put back in place, the plastic melted horror blob is all dug out of the ground and hauled up here in tarps. This cubic yard of toxic crap is here, along with 200 burnt cans, 300 empty propane bottles, huge wads of toasted aluminum foil, and other incombustible trash. Amounts to over 2 cubic yards weighing 400 pounds.

Alluding to what we have to do with this disgusting heap, lamenting how we have to make an extra trip just to dispose of it (and in whose trash can?), I am surprised as Steve offers to haul it all to the FS dumpster. This is an unusual concession by the government and we jump at it. A tiny bone thrown back. I was kinda leading him to this and feel a little smug that the ploy works.

The garbage fills his pickup. I have great satisfaction in filling this spotless government truck with trash. I'm enjoying seeing a toxic dribble of garbage fluid leaking out into the truck bed and sliming his rear bumper. *Why is it that these government bastards only respect garbage and outhouses?* A scatological paradigm among their bureaucrat sociology.

Final pleasantries are passed. He's impressed with our work, and is ready to write the whole thing off. He declares a *probable* cessation of hassle and bureaucratic torment. Yeah sure, we'll see that if it happens.

Eventually he departs and we are left with the pile that covers 6 parking spaces. It takes another 5 hours to pack everything into a massive mound in the truck. A long and laborious process of ropes and bungee cords. Then down the hill. *Goodbye, mountain. Goodbye, sapphires.*

A short highway to the village of Drummond, where we stay the next few nights. Pomo is in heaven again, in the nice room with a huge soft bed. She tolerates the news on the TV, but prefers the Audubon nature channel. We shower 3 times, drink wine, and make love in the other bed, taking care not to disturb Queen Pomo in her soft reclination.

Now we are *free*! Free from the petty green bureaucracy. Sadly, we have paid for our freedom with the mine. Our dream. *And what of the dream now? What of the promise to Bill? What of the perils of global*

warming and dying coral? How can I change the world now, as a fugitive from the Gestapo government? Would robbing a bank help me save the coral faster?

Probably not. I still need the thousands for—everything. I am no closer to Florida. To my coastal beach that also serves as a hovercraft port and coral restoration center. I am still no closer to saving the world. In fact, I'm nowhere closer to even saving my own ass. My ass is deeper in the outhouse than ever. I'm in debt, the mine is hammered, the truck is coughing badly for money from the 3 truckloads piled into one.

But I still have Terry who is wonderfully loyal to me. Though I am a failure to be rich, and a sexfiend rogue who should be labeled *Beware* on social media sites, Terry still loves me for some reason. I have great thankfulness for her, my companion, and great respect. I still have that, but it seems like nothing else.

So I need to continue on, continue without falter or hesitation. Now I'm on to distant mountains, gullies full of gold, jewels in hidden places, wind in the trees, sunshine in my heart, and those who are with me. The Mining Nomads will roam again. Now, as the "Mining Criminals," we will steal our treasure from under the government's nose. We will achieve our destiny of riches, in spite of the political obstacles. Over the mountains of the moon, we will ride, boldly ride, in our quest of El Dorado.

* * * * * *

Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

VISUALIZE the Beams

Ace Boggess

"Why Is the Music So Haunting and Sad?"
—Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*

The singer died a few years back,
unnoticed then. We still listen
to his screeching, morbid laughter
as he mourns a day when he will die,
we will, or the world.

The woman next to me
has stopped her medication
because familiar darkness found her.

I'm smoking more than ever as I drive,
sweating through my collar
how a priest must,
standing up front in his humid church.

Still, the songs remind me, &
songs don't remember what they said, &
songs make everything better
even when they don't, which is
more often now for her.

Me, I'm all ears, thinking,
Tell me something—
anything at all I want to hear.

* * *

"If You Didn't Know Me, Would You Think This Was My Face?"
—Rachel Hicks, Facebook post

We can't call this sideways glance a lasting impression.
We can't *know* anyone.
People we meet in bars along the grayed-
out avenues of Huntington
are ghosts hopping in & out of frame
at times no one's finger clicks the shutter button.
Did we see that? Did our eyes lie?

Even those to whom we feel closest
keep their secrets from us: lovers, hidden bank accounts,
the unvoiced urge to hunt big game in Africa
because they read Hemingway in school.
We won't believe the acts they do,
as they deny us our *us*ness, too.

Our faces, like theirs,
become vapors seen through azure glass—
transient, bending images—
until we're not what we witness either,
minor characters in stories we tell about our lives.
What do you wear beneath the gold party hat?
How do you embrace deception?

I once said violence
was the most authentic thing I ever did,
by which I meant I thought myself innocent
& was wrong.

* * * * * *

Rick Doblin

Questions & Answers About Using Psychedelics

Published at AlterNet.org on December 4, 2013:
https://tinyurl.com/c104doblin.

Rick Doblin, founder and executive director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), appeared on December 3, 2013 on Reddit's *Ask Me Anything* feature to answer questions about psychedelics.

1. *Is it possible for people to have completely different reactions/symptoms from the same psychedelic? Say, hypothetically, I eat mushrooms, and my friend eats the same amount of said mushrooms. Should we experience similar symptoms, or is it possible that genetics could lead to completely different reactions?*

   Rick Doblin: Yes. The beauty of psychedelics is that we don't have psychedelic experiences; we have experiences of ourselves catalyzed by psychedelics. Stan Grof has said that LSD is a "nonspecific amplifier of the unconscious," so that what we experience depends on who we are. LSD is like dreaming: it's not uniform content, it's a way of processing content.

2. *How bad is marijuana for the lungs? Also, is it actually possible to "retrip" (where you hallucinate years later because it's in your spinal fluid) on acid?*

   Rick Doblin: Marijuana does not cause lung cancer, nor does it cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The cannabinoids in marijuana have antitumor properties; however, people who smoke marijuana can sometimes get colds and respiratory infections. I think unbiased risk/benefit analysis by the FDA could result in marijuana in smoked form becoming an approved prescription medicine. LSD is not stored in the spinal fluid and it is not possible to "retrip" years later. That is entirely a Drug War fabrication.

3. *Do you believe that spiritual drug experiences (such as shamanistic rituals involved with ayahuasca) will ever have a place in modern medicine?*

   Rick Doblin: Bill W., the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, took LSD in the 1950s and felt it could play a major role in the treatment of addiction. The spiritual experiences help people to accept themselves, and give people strength. So spiritual experiences will have a place in modern medicine, such as research into LSD for people with anxiety associated with the end of life. Earlier LSD research in the 1960s for cancer patients showed that spiritual experiences were correlated with therapeutic outcomes. Spiritual experiences can occur in a hospital setting as well as in a shamanistic ritual. I think modern psychiatric medicine will increasingly combine psychotherapeutic and spiritual experiences.

4. *My wife and I tried MDMA for the first and only time (so far . . .) earlier this year. It was the best experience I've ever had on any drug. We expected to be sexing like rabbits but, much to my surprise, we had a late night of chatting, laughing, and even airing grievances with each other in a way that we both could just accept and talk through. We cried together over things that we routinely did that were hurtful to the other. We had a whole night of connecting with each other like we never had before. It was downright therapeutic. I think this would be such an incredible drug for couples that need refocused on each other. What kind of work is being done to make MDMA legal for responsible adults?*

   Rick Doblin: [W]e are focused on turning psychedelics into medicine. Relationships aren't diseases. We definitely hope to see this research expand. Medicine will increasingly combine psychotherapeutic and spiritual experiences.

5. *What is your opinion about [T]im [L]eary in terms of psychedelic scientific research[?]*

   Rick Doblin: Tim Leary, when he was at Harvard, did incredibly valuable scientific research. The Good Friday Experiment for which he was a faculty sponsor was the first study of psychedelics in spiritual experiences ever conducted. My undergraduate thesis was a 25-year follow-up study to Leary's study. It was a key to my understanding of the 1960s.

   The people I interviewed who participated in the original Good Friday Experiment told me that the mystical experience of oneness had important political implications in their lives in that it inspired them to see our commonality more so than our differences, and motivated them to work for social change.

   When I look back on the 1960s, the backlash from society was more about psychedelics going right and motivating people to challenge the status quo than it was about psychedelic experiences going wrong, though that happened as well. The Good Friday Experiment has motivated almost all of the current psychedelic researchers. Leary's Concord Prison Experiment was exceptionally idealistic in trying to show that psychedelic mystical experiences could produce measurable reductions in recidivism.

   Where I'm not comfortable with Tim Leary is that once he left Harvard he exaggerated the results of the Concord Prison Experiment and ended up sharing false information. I believe there's something holy and spiritual about science, and that the results of research need to be shared with the greatest of integrity. I admire Tim, but also feel that he became what he was objecting to: Propaganda against psychedelics in his mind justified propaganda for psychedelics. MAPS is trying to be a leader in research into both the benefits and the risks of psychedelics, and reporting them honestly.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

Interlude

Beginning, continuing, & beginning again, every moment new & yet one in an endless chain, finite maybe for a human soul, also for the universe Soul, I don't know—

Do we all begin, continue, end, begin new, or just end, or is this too linear a way to see the complexity of things—

Buds emerge, green, bloom, bloom wild, fade, seeming gone, & yet not—

The song raises, raises, raises higher, climax, conclude, raises again, different, elsewhere, elsewhen—

Time tricks by its wildly solid illusion, its clay, its seeming indifference, time tricks & lures—

Beginning, continuing, & beginning again, same, different, new, old, exciting, not—

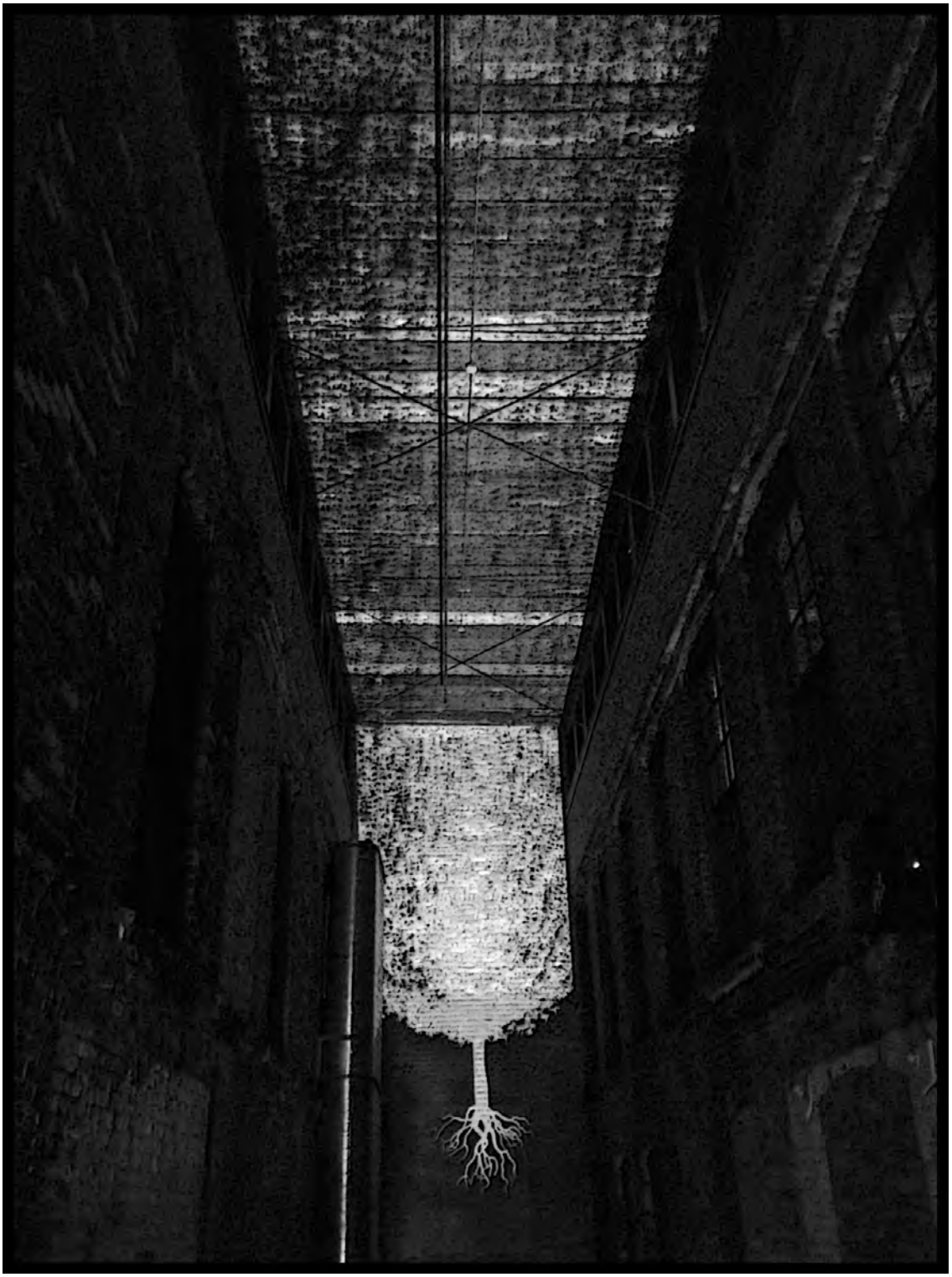
I don't know but pen moving, pages filling, music near to comfort, slantly instruct or urge or encourage—

This, this, & this, & this, many, one, none—

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.

Open my eyes. Look around. Several places at once. Choose.

Strange spaceship buried in the earth. Friend smiling. Waiting.



cix.

In FernKassi time passed vaguely. Maya & Christina & Kinley & Dylan were deeply & comfortably clustered among the ferns with MeZmer the White Bunny & her dearest companion Holly the Hedgedyhog, them all braided *hmmming* together, finding their way even deeper into the strummed fern leaves & their stories.

They found themselves all walking together down the hill from the White Woods into the Fishin' Hole Compound. The main cabin, the workshop nearby, the Fishin' Hole at the bottom of the hill, & beyond its pond, the great mountain in the distance.

This didn't seem so much like a vision, or a memory, or a story viewed, even from deep within.

It seemed *live* somehow.

Nobody had said a word since they'd arrived. They had kept close together, uncertain.

Then suddenly approaching them was Marie the Traveler. Red hair curly to her shoulders, turquoise eyes twinkling her smile, light bloomy dress & barefoot.

"I'm glad you came," she said, her voice sweet if strangely accented. MeZmer & Holly were in a flash's flash near her ankles even as she was taking a hand each of Maya's & Christina's. Smiles a bit shyer to Kinley & Dylan as she led them all down to the Fishin' Hole to sit together & talk.

The day was passed along to late afternoon, dusky colors lightly dusting the sky.

They sat in a half circle all formally regarding each other.

Finally Kinley laughed & said, "I'm not sure how we're here with you, or *what kind* of here this is."

Marie nodded. "Maybe you're here for a reason?"

Dylan spoke up quietly. "I think we came from the Model of the Six Ancient Islands. When they were together?"

Marie nodded.

"We were told it had not been explored."

Nod again.

Christina spoke now. "How do you decide where to travel?"

Marie laughed. "I'm not sure if it's about deciding. More of a . . . collaboration?"

Lastly, it was Maya who now talked.

"Would you come back with us, & travel with us for awhile?"

Marie put her finger on her chin, thinking. Smiled, nodded.

"Will you really be with us?" asked Kinley, as though struggling with this all still.

She laughed. "I don't know."

But when they woke all together of a sudden, there were neither at the Fishin' Hole nor in FernKassi.

It was a strange hotel room, all angles & distortions. Kinley & Dylan instinctively reached out to shield the girls against . . . whatever. But nothing was immediately threatening. Too many walls, not enough floor, a bed too profound like leaking extra dimensions. Still, this is where they crowded onto. Somehow big enough for five.

Nobody said anything right away. Here they suddenly were. Or back at the Fishin' Hole clustered Dreaming? Or back-back in FernKassi's green & gauzy comforts?

Kinley was the first to move. Raising a finger that they hold still, he climbed with difficulty off the bed onto the not-enough floor. Creeped from patch to solid patch toward the door. It & its frame did not fit well together, & it took him several tries to figure a formula for opening it. Several quick kicks & a slow one, two hard tugs, & short *Hmmm* & a shorter Imp's cackle. Then it came open reluctantly still.

I just stand there at this strange doorway, halfway in & halfway out, trying to decide. Then I go through, & look up & down the empty hallway. Less odd than the room behind me, but then I see the room right across the hall has not a door but a full-length mirror instead.

I look into the mirror, deep into it, & I look so tired & haggard, like an old, old man. Ratty dreadlocks, dulled green & golden eyes, one of each, slumped nose. Look like I need two showers at least.

And a thought in my head so sudden & so clear:

You make things so much harder than they need to be—.

I nod. Relax. Nod again. Breathe. Relax.

The return to the hotel bed was shorter, less extra-dimensional. The room had, in fact, totally calmed down.

Kinley found his friends sitting in a row along the edge of the bed, & each of them sucking on a small blindingly blue package.

"G o o o o o o o o o o !" they all explained at once merrily & scooched to give him room & one of the blindingly bloo little packages to suck on too.

"G O O O O O O" was all the package had printed on it, in large friendly letters.

Kinley wasn't sure what had just happened in the hallway, or before in this room, or now in this room.

But he & Christina had a signal they'd learned from Maya. Her pert if still sexy little nose raised up, & *sniff!* & *sniff!* again, & then down, *sniff!* That was the "all clear" signal in Creature Lingua, learned by Maya & shared with them, & Dylan too, who picked up on it & smiled his charming one.

Kinley nodded, bit through his package seal, & drank down what felt like *bloooooooooooo goooooooooooo* . . ! . . !! . . !!!

No wonder the room was stabilized again. It was the *goooooo*'s doing. What this actually meant, Kinley didn't know. It was funny, though, whatever it was, & soon the room was rollicking in laughter led by him. Took awhile to settle back down & by then they were all on the floor.

Kinley notices that an occasional overcoat of his was on him again. And its inner pockets stuffed with many Secret Books.

Oh.

And the door opens again a little & a small horsie Creature comes in, shy & friendly, shared by Maya & Marie as he delivers a folded up map to Kinley.

A polite horsie bow, length of hugs from the zealously *goooooo*'d, & he departs again.

Kinley finds his voice & says, with delight he'd not recked of himself, "A map. Plenty of Secret Books. Marie the Traveler with us. And . . . . "

"*G o o o o o o* !" they all yell.

"We'll be here awhile," he smiles, *sniff*!! nose up, *sniff*!! nose up, *sniff*!! nose down.

cx.

Marie stands. Looks at them all, smile a bit askew, but merry, & leads them all by come-hither finger out of this room & into the hallway.

"Hotel Noah," she says, & each wonders when last here; the *goooooo* scoops their wonderings together & re-directs toward what's to come.

Long hallway, vaguely lit, the carpet designs swishing beneath their feet, but friendly, & the weirdly kind man with the long dreadlocks & floppy hat, green & golden eyes, bent up nose, *sweet sweet sweet nice smile*, is saying, "if you travel in a book-movie-Island, at one point you'll be reading a long document about its history, & many others will be coming at you to read it."

The hallway descends down a little steeper now, & the *goooooo* seems to allow them to levitate down its grade. Their hatted, dreadlocked leader continues: "So you'll read it aloud, & then you'll find that you're trapped by all these people in/on this book-movie-Island. You're trapped & events will accumulate, & you may be able to wiggle yourself free, unfold, reveal, find a way out, through the document, read your way in & around & under the document. It is many columns long, many pages, little pictures, static, this place, *events accumulate!*"

Arriving, Kinley shouts to him, "Secret Books?" & he lingers not but a green eye & golden eye to twinkle, twice, & gone.

Arrived, down, but *goooooo* soft landing, back to the White Woods, again, or already.

One thing, unusually. An old-fashioned steam locomotive train, running through these White Woods? Small, Creature-sized, but luckily the *goooooo* takes care of this as they now too are Creature-sized. There are several cars behind the green & gold locomotive with open air passenger seating. Empty, for the moment. They hop in.

The choo-choo train is swift & quiet, save for the occasional TOOT! TOOT! it bellows, but quiet otherwise.

One could ask: *still back at No-Tell, or Marie's home, or FernKassi?* Here & now seem a shifty pair.

[*Perhaps it's all goooooo time. Perhaps it always was.*]

Now choo-chooing among large warehouse buildings, more shadows than brick & glass, & Maya spots & points out to them the quick-blink-&-gone red doors in the alleys between these buildings.

The choo-choo train stops just before the track does. Time to get off.

Is here *here?* Is this *this?* They walk close together but not huddled in a scare. More a curiosity what puzzle this be.

A vaguely green door with possibly some golden edging. Shuttered window next to it, a neon sign blinking slowly in it. *BAR*, on, off, on, off.

Kinley leads the way, maybe a hunch. His thought flows through them all, *goooooo*'d together as they are.

Door won't open. Pull, push, kick.

Kinley realizes it's not locked, it's a code needs solving, so they try combinations of kicks, high & low, a *hmmm* or 2, a cackle. Something *works*, not sure what, they hurry in.

It's walls-less & murky inside, though indeed there is a bar like a vague neon oasis in one corner.

"Start there" says *goooooo*-mind, & agrees.

Long wooden bar. Old jukebox of 45s in the corner. TV mounted behind the bar. Celtics against someone. Their faces all look like the dreadlocks-man—sometimes several balls at once—

Not a restroom really, much less two, more of a freestanding closet with a rickety door.

"Sit at the bar" says *goooooo*-mind, & agrees.

The barman is a grey-haired gent, friendly smile 'pon them. Short hair, spectacles, colorfully splattered apron. A coaster at each of their bar stools as they sit. No other patrons but a gruff silent woman far down the bar.

"Evening," he says, friendly.
They nod & smile but *goooooo*-mind panics over language & what to do next.

But not to fear. He produces five packets of bright green *goooooo* with a smile.

"These will help with the fully arriving here, & words," he says, handing them out.

Goooooo-mind nods, smiles.

Packages bit in, the bright green *goooooo* sucked in greedily & curiously. And . . . breathe . . . relax . . . wait for it. Mm. Yes. *OK.*

Now double-*goooooo*'d, they feel the weirdness within each of them calm, or at least become more navigable.

"Thank you," Christina speaks up.
Mr. Bob the barman nods.

"DAMN SECRET MOON MISSION!" the gruff woman suddenly bellows at everyone & noone.

Their attention, or *goooooo*-mind's at least, drifts to the old Apex TV mounted in the corner behind the bar—at first a series of photos—old TV, color TV-ish—they watch

—Two smiling people behind a card table of shiny little books, reminds Kinley of those in his overocoat—

—A pretty girl napping in the green grass of a park, holding two little Creatures close—

—A sideways view of a long of a long paved road, tall pines all around it, glowing?—

—An empty desert at blue dusk—

—Deeper Woods, greener, no path—yet—rolling—

—A snake? Rolling?—

This the kind of images that can be introduction to *TripTown* & *goooooo*-mind tugs, is tugged, a breath, a beat,

ulp! ulp! ulp! ulp! ulp! ulp!

Maya's purple eyes come to first, um, oh. *Oh!* It's the bus she met Dylan on! And there he is across the aisle from her!

He's listening to the person sitting next to him in the window seat. An old old man from what Maya can tell. She realizes someone is sitting in the window seat next to her too, but she compels herself not to look. Not ready yet to know.

Old old man talking softly, steadily, penetratingly. She can hear easily.

Is this then/now? Is this why she keeps remembering this ride? Did she dream the rest?

She listens, like everything depends on this.

"I lived back then in a cabin out in the One Woods. That's their original name, Son. I was a caretaker of this cabin for a strange rich man. Out there, honesty's tell, to clean up my shit. Just living cumes this, Son. Just days & hours & breaths & hands to your face.

"It was peaceful out there & I began to calm. I could not have found my way back to civi by myself if I'd tried. No, Son, I was dropped out there unconscious, been told if I wasn't careful, got lost, I'd die out there too.

"I'd just sit in this old green armchair, 'pon waking with the light, sit there at the cabin's one window & watch it all come visible again. Twitch out my habit & my brokedown heart day by day, hour by hour, & it was peaceful. Sipping water from the well, eating dried fruits, & cereal with condensed milk, & it was good, Son. It was *choiceless*, you see, *choiceless.*

"Son, then I saw beyond the clearing around my cabin up in the Woods, but still so visible & beautiful, a great rainbow-colored snake. *Oh ye gods rejected by Emandia! O ye gods! So beautiful! O Son!*

"It began appearing every morning, after dawn, but before much fuller light. Wouldn't stay long but twas there, yes.

"This cabin was stocked for the Aftermath, & sure. A basement filled with all kinds of equipment, Son, & there I found a pair of good binoculars. And so I was ready every morning to watch from my darkened cabin, sit & watch this beautiful creation.

"Son, I saw it rise up, for reasons I could not fathom, rise up high, & move along the ground on tiny powerful feet.

"Then he noticed me, his green & golden eyes, like mine you see in my old face, young & rocking then, look into my eyes, deep into me, slide into me through my eyes, divide & divide & divide again & explore me minutely, blood & bone, past years, thoughts, hungers, yes, sure. Son, I was known, first time ever before or since, I was *met & known.*

"Now, Son, I had unusual ideas in my mind. Didn't always work to my advantage, why I was self-banished out to the One Woods. I wondered, *what would that snake eat?* Once this idea got in me, I could not shake it out.

"The fridge was old, unlike a lot of the other gear there. It was an icebox, worked well in tandem with that icy stream a short walk away.

"Dug deep in that fridge, seemed bigger inside than it looked, like that old TV space opry show. Came up with a stash of these little cans of olives. Why in a refrigerator? 'Imported special,' those cans said, but told no more.

"Then, Son, come the day I was waiting outside there before sunup, sitting on a stump on the edge of that clearing, quaking with my can of olives. Opened with a pull tab, like old cans of beer.

"But it was easy. He came up to me &, like we'd always done it, he would accept one olive every morning. Curl near me, rise up & take the olive in his jaw, watching me all the time, our green & golden eyes opposite to each other, so matched as we stared one another, accept it without chewing, & sort of depart slowly, still rised up but in reverse, still holding the olive in his jaw. *Every day, Son. Every damned one.*"

Fell asleep in a blink against Dylan's shoulder, seemed almost small & shrunken now, & was gone at the next stop.

When Dylan stands up to let him up, I panic & turn away quickly to whoever is next to me.

Oh. *Oh.* It's Kinley, in his long coat, little fold down tray before him, a pile of colored Secret Books. He seems to be reading several at once too, if that's possible. Guess with him it is.

cxi.

Rey & I hand in hand follow the wooden hallway along, quietly for a fair stretch.

"Tell me a story, Rey."
"A story, Ray?"
"Yes."
"You're the writer."
"*Tell me one. Please*." I smile as ragged fool charming hopeful as I can.

She considers, smiles, nods.
"What kind?"
"Was there a before-this-spaceship for you, that you remember?"

Her face mulls, mulls, darkens, withins, then sort of roughly returns back to me & she looks straight ahead into the wooden glow as she talks. Hands well-grasped together.

"I used to wake up in the night & find my whole body was like an electrical wire, dipped in cold water. A lot.

"Sitting up. My new lover still deep in her sleepings, slept like a feather on moonlight. I'd rub my mouth, & feel a hole, press my fingers in tenderly, & feel all my teeth are bashed in. Crooked & loose.

"I don't move an inch, but panicked. *What the hell? What's this all about? What does any of this mean?* I didn't know."

She pauses a long time. Just our boots stepping along for sound.

"I close my eyes & think, *please, please, please, please let this be a dream*, & I fall back toward my pillow, back toward my pillow, fall forever toward my pillow, Ray, & I fade through scenes, colorful, sepia, black-&-white scenes, liquid, *falling falling falling* toward my pillow."

Silence. Then, up ahead, the bittiest of purple glows? We hurry in synch. It's sort of a dancing in the wooden glowy murk.

Oh. Oh. *Oh. Pirth.*

Tis Pirth, beautiful dancing purple mystery, & Rey joins him in his dancing, as though always they'd danced together in this strange place. Maybe they had.

Along this ancient wooden hallway, there is a side-door I did not know of. Pirth pauses, still dancing, as tho to direct us.

Rey looks at me, still dancing. I find I am too, a little, remembering I have a bit of the general groove in me.

Dance-dance, dance-dance, dance-dance

"Not in me to say no to Creatures," I say, dancing, smiling.

Door is green, its door knob golden. Is this all for colors now? Well, at least Pirth isn't.

Steps & something. Steps & something.

Rey's hand in mine as we go in, a sense of Pirth restored to his pocket in my plaid green jacket. More *hmmm* than anything else, here, arrhythmic beats embedded in it, then a thripping throbbing of lights, the *Hmmm* warm & snaky now

Pirth, Rey. *OK.*

Now we're in a room that I think sort of familiar. I find myself in an armchair, sort of you could say waking up, & Pirth is in my grasp lightly.

She's on the couch nearby. Under a warm brown blanket covered in sober, handsome Bears. I'm glad Rey is warm & comfortable.

But she shifts a bit & her long red hair half-tumbles out. I start. I wait.

The blanket slips again & I can see she's dressed in a green & gold sweater, a long lacy flowery skirt, barefoot. *None of these are Rey's.*

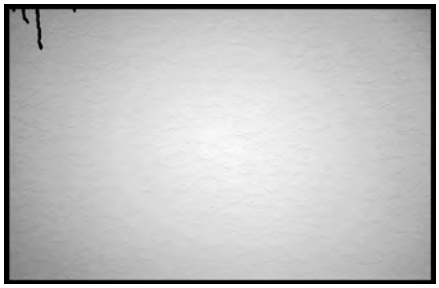
"*Shhh*" a voice in my mind says. I look down at Pirth who I can tell hears these words too but did not speak them.

I calm. Reply in kind. "Rey?"

"That's Figga. She was, is, my true love."
"Where are you?"
"I can't see her right now or talk to her."
"Why?"
"*I can't.* I'm safe."
"Where?"
"Your other pocket. With your medal pinned to it."
"How?"
Silence. OK.
"Tell me, Rey."
"I can't."
"She's going to wake up & see me. What do I say?"

Almost as though reacting to this thought conversation, Figga pulls the warm Bear Blanket back around her, shifts around to curl into the couch.

"Tell me, Rey. Please."
Silence. I wait.
Somehow Pirth is reaching out to pat Rey's nose. I close my eyes, feel around gently for her hand, & she takes it, & Pirth along, & we arrive somewhere, not her mind's house like before, but somewhere maybe more neutral. Ancienne Coffeehouse.



Two arm chairs in a shadowy corner. Pinth dancing on the spot on table between us, with many delighted purple Imps.

She talks but unhappy maybe forgetting here & now & me in this sadness. Deep sadness.

"there was a fire. there. A man saved her."

"A fire?" "Yes."

"Accidental?" "No."

"You?" "Yes."

"Why?" "I wanted her free of all this."

"Free?" "Of this spaceship. All of it."

"Rey, I dont understand."

"She wasn't from here."

"Here?"

"She'd come here by mistake."

"From where?" "The White Woods."

"She'd come here by mistake. See that door?"

"Yes." "That's the way out."

Figga suddenly wakes & I feel *sloooped* back to the darkened room, armchair & Pirch, Rey in my pocket hidden.

Turquoise eyes flash at me knowing.

"You saved me."
A nod in my mind before I can stutter "What?"
"Thank you."
I nod. Smile. "My name is Raymond."
"I'm Figga."

["Now what?"
"Get her out the door. It will seem like a dream, & she'll be free."]

Her pretty face turns anxious. "Have you seen my friend? I was supposed to meet her there. I was waiting."

[*Shake your head.*
No, Rey.
Shake your head.]

I shake my head. Stand up & walk over to Figga. Sigh inly, loudly inly, for Rey to hear.

I hold out my hand. "There's a door over there"—I point where Rey directs my finger—"back to the White Woods."

She stares me plainly no. "I have to find my friend." Her pretty face begins to crumple with worry. "I have to make sure she's OK."

Ignoring Rey I sit down on the edge of the couch. "I'll help you find her, but I think you should sleep some more."

"Was she called home?" she asks, worried. Rey wrestles me down in my mind, & for a moment I can't speak, only hold Figga's hand, & adjust the Bear Blanket around her.

We compromise & I *hmmm* Figga back to sleep.

cxii.

It was a book & a TV show & a series of films & I think a Broadway production called *Ten* & I'm not sure how it figures in here yet but hear out the story before other matters.

He was a young black football player, stinking talented, a great smile, hubris & charm twined together.

Yet his devotion to his sport was so complete he knew nothing about love & little about friendship beyond the playing field.

That summer he was sent by his stepfather, who'd raised him alone, on a trip across the country to see everything before college & the deeper grinding devotion to his sport that he so anticipated.

Handed the young man an envelope with a series of bus tickets, each would travel him from one place a fair distance to the next place. A second envelope contained papers telling him where to stay in each place. A third contained paper-clipped wads of money, some for each leg of his journey.

The knapsack he was given had maps in it, slim volumes of information on each place, & a credit card & cellular phone hidden in pockets a thief would never find, these for emergencies.

The knapsack also had used but comfortable clothes, nothing flashy, no ties or trinkets. And some lined blank books to write in, & some unlined ones to draw in. Some writing pencils, some drawing pencils. A very small voice recorder with hundreds of hours available for use.

A white business card with green & gold printing. A number to call 24/7 "if you are lost."

The young man, whose actual parentage & origins were unknown to him, whose skin color suggested black but was perhaps something simple than this, trusted his stepfather even as they had never talked much. He would have spent all summer practicing his passes & improving his speed & agility on the football field at his now old high school.

But this. Thought to refuse. Didn't.

Ten destinations. And one real instruction. "You will encounter someone in each place, feel a strange tug of connection. Smile. Say hello. Say your name. Say you are traveling. Ask how the other person is doing, his or her name."

So *Ten* begins. This handsome boy with the excellent physical gifts & mediocre grades, & less than mediocre understanding of the world, hugs his stepfather briefly, & gets on the bus that first morning. And we will intermittently follow him.

"Wake up, kids!" the barman calls close to them, & now Maya & Kinley & Christina & Dylan are rousing up, still at BAR it seems.

Christina notices first. "Where's Marie?"
She's not with them. Maybe never was, but it sure seemed so for awhile.
They look at Mr. Bob the barman for answers.
He shrugs. "Maybe she had to go back to work." He gestures to the Secret Book bulges in Kinley's long overcoat. They nod.

"What now, Kinley?" Christina asks, figuring he'll at least start their discussion with an idea.
Kinley looks friendly at Mr. Bob. Points to the walls-less murk beyond the bar. "What's deeper in?"
Smiles. Shrugs. "Depends on you."

I stand up. Nod. Smile. "Let's go." Even offer my hand to Dylan.
Kinley peers me close. "Maya?"
I match him. "There's nothing here to worry about. We're on the Model Islands still, one of them. That means the Thought Fleas are guarding us."
Still they all pause.

I take a breath for patience, & try again. "The Thought Fleas are Guardians of the White Woods, where we are. They guard all in the Woods."

Looks up at me, purple eyes sparking.

OK. Sure. Here I am.

Sit at bar, nod friendly to Mr. Bob who fetches me a mug of iced water.

"There are parts & places in this book that are not safe. But not this. I promise."

Now Christina stands. "Are you coming with us?"
I shake my head. Pause. "Tell you what. I'll stay here with my old friend Mr. Bob the barman. In case you come back this way."

OK then. They set off with smiles & waves & are gone in murk in moments.

"Do you know where they're bound, son?"
I shake my head. "That's what makes it fun."

Awhile two pairs fairly close. Christina doesn't hold Kinley's hand but something else.

They come to a place of sound. It's a weird kind of little movie theater. Assorted sizes & kinds of chairs facing a small freestanding projector screen. Right now there's a film but no audience.

So they sit. No rows exactly, but they pick seats near the back.

More Fun is handwritten on a white sheet, hanging by a single piece of old tape from the bottom of the screen.

The Recruiter & The Postman travel a long time together, not precisely friends but watch out for each other.

Postman won't kill the Melties though. When Recruiter finds one, Postman will disappear on down the road to meet up again later.

They have an agreement built up over time. The Postman continues along about a mile on up the road, finds somewhere to wait. Doesn't ask after & Recruiter doesn't tell.

Then the time they come into a town, mostly deserted as they are, but no, actually not.

One three-story brick building on the town's main street. Music from third floor. A party?

A sign on the door on the side of the building leading up there. White sheet, old piece of tape affixing it.
Says, "for those lost."

They both go.

The Recruiter is a big muscled man in leather & denim. Postman is dumpy, middle-aged, shorter. One everyone notices, the other nobody.

Yet Recruiter has learned this Postman is most certainly *not* a nobody. He's smart in a way that

keeps survival foremost in mind for him & his. Uses his words, his tone, his touch, his unimpressive appearance. Watch.

Recruiter is greeted. There are pretty girls, unmelted. There are musicians, equally so. There are Travelers. It seems a crossroads. Information. Food, drink. Some company.

Postman feels something off in all this. Edges around the crowds in the living room, unnoticed.

A back bedroom, door locked. Weird noises within. Sex?

"Hi," says a handsome young black fellow to Kinley.
Startled but OK, Kinley smiles him in return. "Hello."
"Do you know where I am?"
Kinley doesn't laugh.
"Are you OK?"

Shakes his head. "This isn't where I meant to go. I got off the bus at Omaha on a break, to use the restroom, & ended up here."
"Nebraska?" asks Christina.
The young man nods, letting his upset more show.

"How long have you been here?" asks Dylan, movie forgotten by them all now, it quietly pauses.

"I don't know. It feels like I'm dreaming. Like I'm still on that bus, or fell asleep in a bathroom stall. But I can't wake up."

He holds tightly to his knapsack tho nobody attempts to take it from him.

["Will he travel with them now?" Mr. Bob asks me. We can see & hear all this knowing, as they don't, that they've barely walked twenty feet from BAR.
["Maybe."
[Looks me solid now. "Are you writing this with all the lights shining in your skies? All seven colors?
["I'm not sure."
["Why not?"
["I remember. I forget. I remember."
[Nods. "Flowjustflow, son. Pick it up after."
[Put CCR's *Green River* on Polly iPod, see a rippling distorted image of me in my old plaid green jacket in that far window. Boston my adopted homeland, coffeeshop in it, & Saturday night & the faces & their gadgets all around me.

[On my table, little blue-green coin purse & its lovely trinkets helping me direct this book right now, & also two little traveling clocks & a little AM-FM transistor radio, long-time companions, gadgets of another time.

[This notebook is *Labyrinthine* but only Part Eleven in it, two companion notebooks contain the earlier 2675 pages.

[Old blue jeans on me. An old green t-shirt from Portland, Oregon living days. New boots & socks at least.

[If not danger, then a question is needed here. What would that be?]

I look at them all now.

"Why is there something instead of nothing?"

They look at me intently, benignly, even the young black man, his name is Troy they have learned. Like that guy in *Community* the TV show but no more really him than Rey is the girl from the *Star Wars* movies. Just friendly allusions.

"That's the question."
"For us?" asks Dylan.
"Yes."
They nod.
"Is there an answer?" asks Maya.
"Yes. No. One. None. Many."

At this a cackling little black & white pandy bear appears & skitters into Troy's open hand. A smile on his face.

"I know you."
Cackle cackle.
"I mean I did. A long time ago."
Cackle cackle.

He looks at the rest of us. "Before I had football I was a scrawny kid. And black in a white neighborhood. I found her in the Woods nearby."
They nod smile.

Troy's face then darkens. "But I lost you. All those nights we sat in my bed, me talking, you laughing. *I lost you.*"

"I don't think so," says Kinley.
"She goes sometimes," says Maya.

Troy looks around at them & at the imp in wonder. "Why did you return now?"
Cackle cackle, crazy eyes & laugh.

"I think to assure you you are with friends now," says Dylan softly.

Troy listens, quiet. Nods, remembering something.
"Hello, I'm Troy. I am traveling. My stepfather told me to always say that. I forgot because I was lost.

They all nod, imp cackles.

["Thanks" I say to Mr. Bob.
He nods, pleased.]

cxiii.

Figga wakes up eventually & smiles to find herself still covered by the warm Bear Blanket & with Pirth now in her grasp.

She starts to tell me a story & I can feel Rey relaxing & listening. It's not the words, I realize. It's the sound of her voice, its unique music.

"I was in the Woods because I was looking for a friend I don't see very often. But I got worried about him & he agreed to meet me, to talk, to let me check up on him, as I would. Nobody else does anymore."

I nod her go on.

"He travels around, studying good & evil, it's his vocation, to try to understand these things. *Do they exist outside of circumstance? Or do they simply embody the sum of a given situation or aspect of it?* That's how he would talk. *Good & evil, either, both, are they forces of creation? Or estimations of the human mind about human behavior?"*

I nod. Curious. "Was he your brother, your boyfriend, something like that?"

Shakes her head, nicely, but almost impatiently. "No, we don't have all that where I come from. All the . . . differences like here. But we come here & we, um, he called it *suiting up*." She gestures her pretty face, long red hair, slim blanketed figure. "Like this." Her tone isn't modest or prideful. It's indifferent, like her body is a glove, a pair of casual clothes.

She nods to something, goes on. "He wasn't always like that. It was someone he'd known here. Not meat like you, or suited up like me. Mechanical?"

"An automaton?"

She cocks her head, pretty, thinking. Nods. "She had been with him for a long time, tended his needs when he was first here. As he evolved in form, following your pattern, he learned better what she was & would tend her in return.

"She . . . learned him somehow. She didn't see the suit so much as what was him within. He told me it made him feel human, & this was never anything we had sought.

"He told me she was one of the older types more modeled on human behavior & its mercurial nature. He said that changed with later models until eventually all of them were rounded up & destroyed by the State."

She's quiet. "But the last time I saw him he told me a few had escaped, including her. He was going to a Festival where he thought she would be. But he was so dark, & his studies of good & evil spooked me. It was like he'd lost all hope, & just wanted answers."

"Did he find her? At the Festival?"

Her face darkens. "I don't know. I was given some strange instructions by someone I didn't know."

Pauses. "I was lost out in the Woods. I was crying, not imitating a sad girl really. Then a door opened up from the earth, & *she* looked up at me, smiled, nodded, held out her hand."

[Because this is *Labyrinthine* & no other, I can interrupt the narrative with live news—

I'm sitting with you in my heart, Traveling Troubadour, at this show of a musical hero to me like you; he's retiring from touring, maybe prefers other ways to spend his music's hours—yet I get a live glimpse & listen of him for a couple of hours—

I don't know if Paul Simon was quite your favorite kind of rock & roll, tho I'm sure you liked him—I've loved his music most of my life—

His stage is full of stands & instruments, enough for a big band—

Like Miles, Claude, Lynch, he's remained true through many long years—lived long & still true to his Art—

I wish a path long like his & theirs]

"Rey."
"No."
"*Rey.*"
"No."
"Why?"
"Lead her to the door."
"She doesn't want to."
Silence.

Then Figga is sitting up, still fairly covered in the Bear Blanket, but her smile is sugar & sunrise. She is holding her hands together & Pirth is dancing on them like a stage.

I have to decide & can't.

Pirth does for us. Her dances from her hands over to the wall mirror at the far end of the room, & on through, one going on, one happily dancing still on this side.

Figga stands. Holds out her hand to me. "Help me find her." And we hurry to the mirror wall & touch to reflection & now we are on the other side looking back at ourselves but are no longer reflections of each other.

"Hmm," I mutter. "Not usually so easy for people-folks."
"Figga's not regular people-folks," says Rey in my mind. Her voice is sad, & yet curious where we will go next.

We follow Pirth who leads us through room after room, mirror after mirror, each time leaving an iterate behind.

I want to stop, or at least to know, but Rey *hmmms* me calm & agreeable. Because it's her, & this is her true love, I calm, I agree, I keep going.

I feel like we are coming near to something. Like an arrival. No picture in my mind, no slow of our pace through these darkened mirror-walled rooms, & yet the feeling comes on more.

There comes a room much larger then than the rest, not murky but blinding bright of colors, so much I grasp up Pirth & hold tight Figga's hand. Hold Rey close too within me.

Finally too bright & I stop us.

"Close your eyes," Rey says.
I hear Figga gasp. She hears her too.

"Close your eyes & you'll be able to see where you are & keep going. Trust me."

We do. Close eyes, see much better, & move forward slowly.

To be continued in Cenacle | *105* | *October 2018*

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Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

John Barton lives in New York. Maybe. I've seen John only once in nearly 20 years, at the funeral of our dear friend Jim Burke III, in 2011. Friendly, but not really a friend any longer. His piece in this issue is from *Cenacle* | 32-33 | Winter 1999. It was inspired, in part, by my 1998 poem, "The Millennial Artist's Survival Guide," but is much more his provocative thinking than anything else. I wish you well on your path, John. And remember you fondly.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. He's nudging toward gainful & happy employment with a mining company, tramping, taking samples, mapping. Getting paid too. *Will wonders ever cases?* More of his writings can be found at http://therubyeye.blogspot.com.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His poetry in this issue is from his upcoming book, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It Is So,* to be published by Unsolicited Press in August 2018. I am ever grateful for the poems he contributes to *The Cenacle*.

Ric Doblin is the founder and executive director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (maps.org). He does brilliant, brave work in the field of psychedelic liberation.

Leia Friedman is a writer, clinician, & professor living in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her travel journal in this piece marks her writing's first appearance in *The Cenacle.* Her present focus in psychology involves the teachings of meditation, yoga, ecology, and the use of psychedelics to assist psychotherapy for clinical disorders. She & I both belong to the Boston Entheogenic Network (https://tinyurl.com/y7v3vjj5).

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She's been talking lately about changing up familiar things, seeing what the dust looks like. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His piece in this issue is adapted from his *Divided Quantum* series, found at dividedquantum.net. He's been feeling under the weather recently. Hoping you get back on top ASAP! Jimmy's most recent book, *Nonlocal Nature: The Eight Circuits of Consciousness,* was published by New Falcon Publications in 2017.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle.* Been doing some intense translating recently. More of his work can be found online at: http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He's been traveling to the Azores to drink good wine, & watching World Cup soccer of late. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 103 | April 2018. Your poetry keeps getting better & better, my friend.

Many Blooms: A Sampler of Modern Women Poets features a selection from each of the six poets Kassi & I selected to appear in the 2005 Burning Man Book volume called *Many Blooms: An Anthology of Modern Women Poets.* This anthology can be found online at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. When not writing brilliant poems, she teaches, swims, & also hosts the excellent monthly poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com).

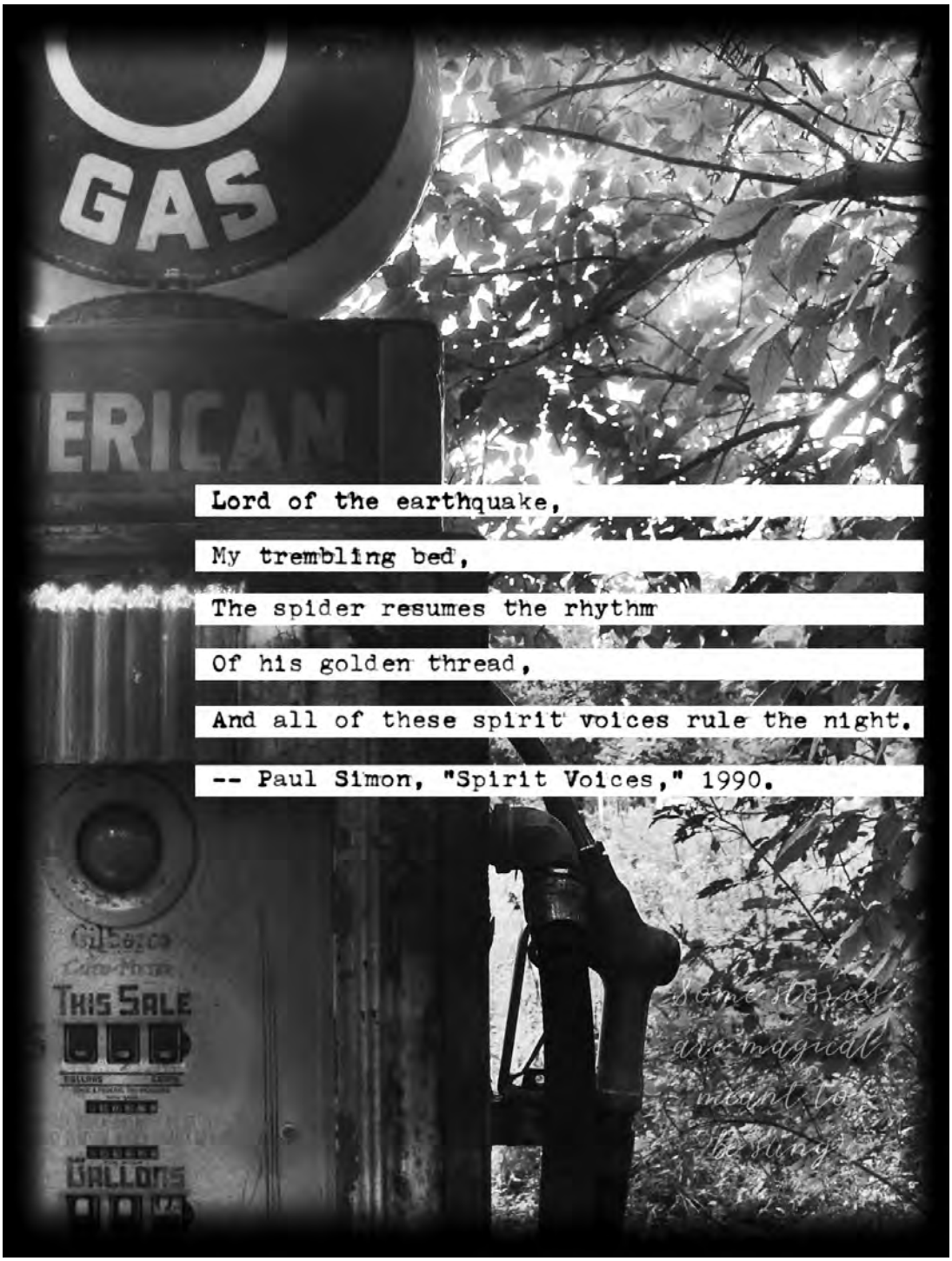
Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Wishing you the best of good health after your recent surgery. Her recent book of poetry, *Never Completely Awake*, was published by Deer Brook Editions in 2017. More of her writings can be found at: https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His newest book of cowboy stories is called *Between Mountain and River,* published in 2018 by Pocol Press.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Her photography & graphic design make this periodical the visually beautiful thing perfect to match its wonderful contributors. She is a visually beautiful thing herself too.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Thinking it's OK to be Happy.

* * * * * *



Lord of the earthquake,

My trembling bed,

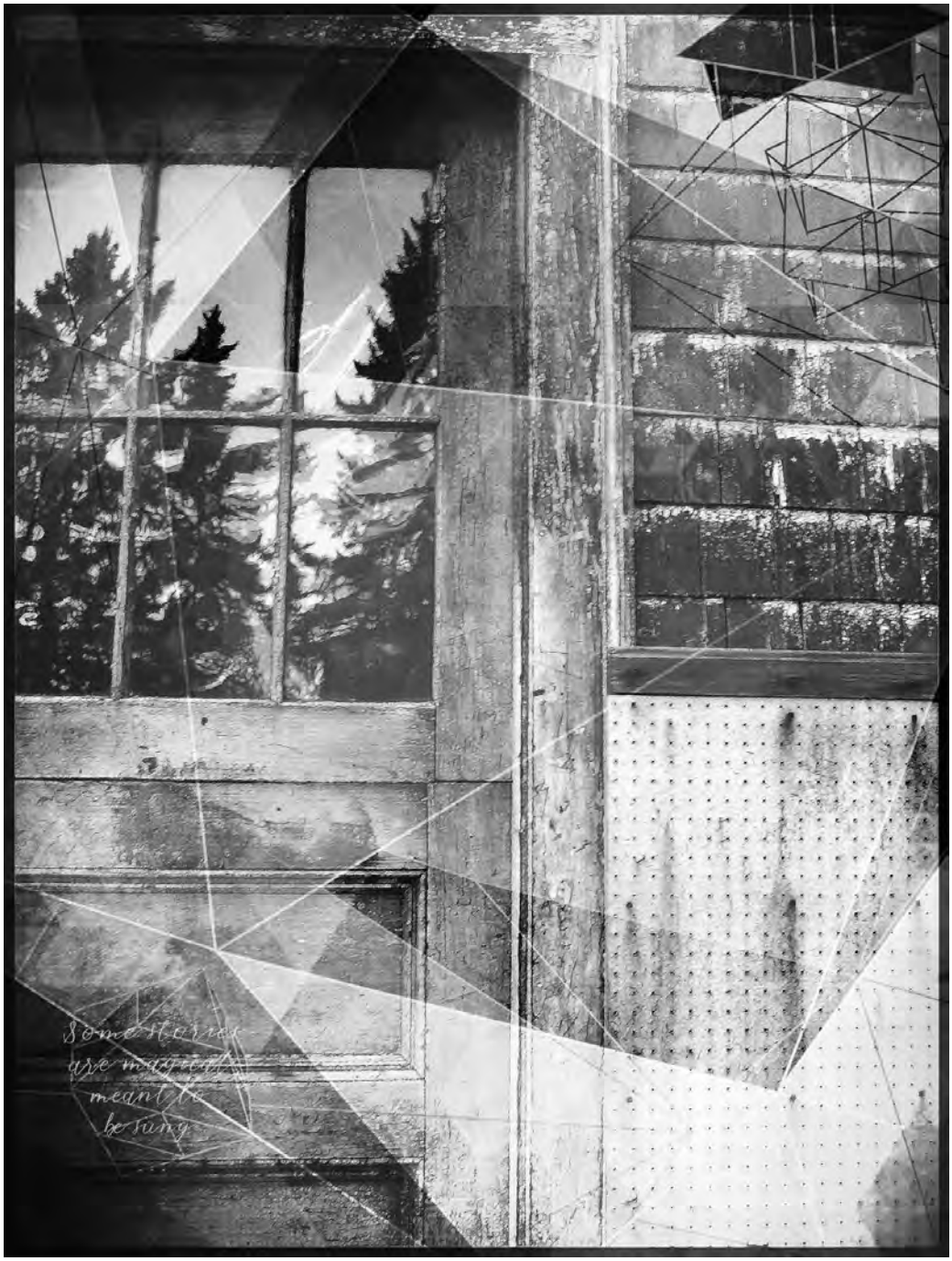
The spider resumes the rhythm

Of his golden thread,

And all of these spirit voices rule the night.

-- Paul Simon, "Spirit Voices," 1990.

Some roses are magical, meant to be sung


Some stories
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